

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Rural perceptions of intimate partner violence

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Why this research is important

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is more prevalent and chronic in rural areas in Canada and globally; rates have been fairly static over the past decade in Canada, and some forms of IPV have actually increased. There are several factors specific to rurality, which help maintain IPV. For example, geographic barriers, such as distance to services, weather, and lack of transportation are commonly cited. This research extends the discussion by exploring the perceptions and attitudes held by rural communities toward IPV.

Perceptions of IPV shape the extent to which communities tolerate violence as well as the opportunities that perpetrators and victims have to end violence. However, few qualitative studies focus on rural Canada. Understanding perceptions and attitudes of rural communities can help fill gaps in informing policy,

What you need to know

The purpose of this research was to examine rural perceptions of intimate partner violence (IPV), and how these perceptions have been constructed. Rural regional service centres in Brandon, Manitoba, and Sydney, Nova Scotia, were selected to examine the community perceptions of IPV through semi-structured interviews of service providers. The similarities and differences among the case studies illustrate how rurality and cultural variations embedded in place significantly influence the perceptions towards IPV, and subsequently the rates and maintenance of IPV.

programming, and the broader theoretical understanding of IPV for use within both academia and at the community level.

How the research was conducted

In order to explore perceptions of IPV, service providers from Brandon, Manitoba, and Sydney, Nova Scotia, participated in in-depth interviews. Service providers were chosen because there is not an abundance of agencies whose mandate is focused on helping those who experience IPV, and the ones that do exist are embedded in their communities (e.g., networking, presentations, and events). Brandon and Sydney were chosen because

they are both regional cities, which function as service centres for their surrounding rural communities. The data were analyzed for common themes which responded to each research question: What are the perceptions of IPV in rural/small town Canada, how are these perceptions socially constructed, and what strategies can we implement to change these perceptions?

What the researcher found

The first research objective of this project was to further understandings of rural perceptions of IPV. The four key findings emerging from this research question were the use of othering, victim blaming, normalizing the violence, and creating a public/private divide where IPV was a private family issue. These four themes reinforce two broader processes of minimizing and marginalizing the problem of IPV, creating a hazardous environment for victims.

The second objective was to explore how these perceptions are being constructed. It was found that constructions of rurality itself help to sustain such perceptions. Service providers in Brandon and Sydney named patriarchal systems as a leading force constructing community perceptions, through traditional gender roles and family structures.

How this research can be used

Pertaining to the third objective, this research provides evidence that more preventative measures need to be taken in order to reduce rates of IPV. More services are needed in rural areas with more funding and better transportation options, for both those who are victims of IPV and those who perpetrate the violence. Service providers also call for better education, with an additional focus on males (e.g., teaching the tools to deal with constructions of masculinity without violence). In

short, they suggest addressing the problem from all fronts, not just removing the victim from the situation. The research can also be used in the discussion of the theorization of how rurality specifically influences perceptions towards IPV. Experiences of living in rural areas are unique in their lifestyles, culture, and social experiences, and as such, have different influences on community perceptions of IPV than found within urban areas. As IPV deserves to be a visible public issue, the uniqueness attributed to rural living, such as traditional views of the family and gender roles, deserves to be visible as well.

About the researcher

Meghan Wrathall completed this research this past summer and now holds a master's degree in Rural Development. She will be starting a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Guelph this September and plans to continue researching intimate partner violence and rural areas. Wratham17@BrandonU.ca

Keywords

Intimate partner violence; rural Canada; perceptions, social constructions; regional service centres

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