

Impact of domestic violence on women's mental health

March 31 2015



Credit: George Hodan/public domain

In addition to their physical injuries, women who are victims of domestic violence are also at a greater risk of mental health problems such as depression and psychotic symptoms. These are the findings of a study that was just published by a team of researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London in England, the Institut universitaire en santé mentale de Montréal

(IUSMM), and the University of Montreal.

"We studied the impact of domestic violence on the risk of mental health problems, particularly depression," explained Isabelle Ouellet-Morin, first study author and a researcher at the Institut universitaire en santé mentale de Montréal. "We also studied the role of certain factors from the victims' personal history, such as childhood abuse and economic poverty," explained Ms. Ouellet-Morin, who is also a professor at the School of Criminology at the University of Montreal.

1,052 mothers participated in the Environmental Risk (E-Risk) Longitudinal Twin Study over 10 years. Only subjects with no previous history of depression were considered for the study. Over this decade, the researchers conducted multiple interviews to determine whether the subjects had suffered violence from their spouses and whether they suffered from mental health disorders.

Results

- More than one third of the women reported suffering violence from their spouses (e.g., being pushed or hit with an object).
- These women had a more extensive history of childhood abuse, abuse of illicit substances, economic poverty, early pregnancy, and an antisocial personality.
- They were twice as likely to suffer from depression, even when controlling for the impact of childhood abuse.
- Domestic violence had an impact not just on mood but on other mental health aspects as well. These women had a three times higher risk of developing schizophrenia-like [psychotic symptoms](#). This risk doubled for women who were also victims of childhood abuse.

"Domestic violence is unacceptable because of the injuries it causes. We

have shown that these injuries are not only physical: they can also be psychological, as they increase the risk of depression and psychotic symptoms," added Louise Arseneault, a researcher at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. "Health professionals need to be very aware of the possibility that [women](#) who experience [mental health problems](#) may also be the victims of [domestic violence](#) and vice versa. Given the prevalence of [depression](#) in these [victims](#), we need to prevent these situations and take action. These acts of violence do more than leave physical damage; they leave psychological scars as well," concluded Dr. Arseneault.

More information: Ouellet-Morin,¹ H. L. Fisher, M. York-Smith,² S. Fincham-Campbell,² T. E. Moffitt²⁻³ and L. Arseneault² (2015) Intimate partner violence and new-onset depression: a longitudinal study of women's childhood and adult histories of abuse. *Depression and Anxiety*.

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Impact of domestic violence on women's mental health (2015, March 31) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

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