

Combined intimate partner violence that includes sexual violence is common and more damaging

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Women who experience sexual violence combined with other forms of intimate partner violence suffer greater damage to their health and are

much more likely to attempt suicide, according to a study led by researchers at the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care published today [12 November] in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*.

Intimate partner [violence](#)—psychological, physical or [sexual violence](#) perpetrated by a current or former partner—is the most common form of violence experienced by women worldwide.

The study, conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and University of Melbourne, found that all types of intimate partner violence were associated with long-lasting damage to health but combinations that included sexual violence were more common and markedly more damaging to women's physical and [mental health](#).

Researchers analyzed data from the WHO multi-country study on women's health, which has information from 16 different sites in 11 different countries on over 21,000 women who have ever had a partner. This new analysis assessed different combinations of psychological, physical and sexual intimate partner violence and their impacts on health.

They found that over 15 percent of ever-partnered women had experienced a combination of intimate partner violence that included sexual violence. Those who had experienced this in the last year were ten times more likely to attempt suicide than those who had not. Women who had experienced multiple forms of abuse were also more likely to experience difficulty walking, difficulty with [daily activities](#), pain or discomfort, poor memory or concentration, dizziness, and vaginal discharge, and to be taking sleeping pills or painkillers.

Study lead Dr. Lucy Potter, a GP and NIHR In-Practice Clinical

Research Fellow at the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care, said: "We know intimate partner violence is damaging to health. What this study adds is the recognition of the profound harm caused by multiple forms of abuse, particularly when it includes sexual violence, and how we do not see this when all forms of abuse are lumped together as one experience. Practitioners and [policy makers](#) must appreciate the diversity of experience of intimate partner violence to tailor support appropriately.

"We also found that these health impacts persist over a year after the abuse ends. So, effective prevention and early intervention are vital to the health of individuals and families and health systems."

Senior author, Professor Gene Feder from the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care, said: "Violence against women is a violation of human rights that damages their and their children's physical and mental health, with substantial health care and societal costs. It is an important cause of ill health among women globally and an indicator for Goal 5—Gender Equality and Women and Girls' Empowerment—of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

"This study, analyzing the impact of different types and combinations of [intimate partner violence](#), shows the severe health impact when these include sexual or psychological abuse. These types of abuse are often not recognized by [health](#) care providers."

More information: Lucy C. Potter et al, Categories and health impacts of intimate partner violence in the World Health Organization multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyaa220

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