

Psychologists identify 18 best measures to assess intimate partner violence

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Millions of people experience intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime and assessment is important in conducting therapy and assisting victims. A team of psychologists at Binghamton University, State University of New York have evaluated dozens of available measures used to assess intimate partner violence and have pinpointed the most effective ones.

IPV is a blanket term used to refer to not only acts of physical violence, but other abusive behaviors, such as psychological and [emotional abuse](#) or control tactics. According to estimates by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, within the United States, 22.3% of women and 14% of men experience severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.

Binghamton University doctoral student Erin F. Alexander and Professor of Psychology Matthew D. Johnson typically administer a measure of IPV to couples therapy patients, and they became curious about which measures are best to use in a [clinical practice](#) as well as in research.

"When we located 87 measures, we realized that before conducting any further research, one of the most important contributions we could make to the field is sorting through these measures to identify which measures are of the highest quality," said Alexander.

The researchers examined prior research on each measure. After evaluating each one, they recommended 18 of the available 87. The

measures fit different purposes including brief screening instruments, measures of severity, measures used in criminal justice settings, measures of attitudes related to violence without overtly asking about violent behaviors, and measures of specific forms of abuse (e.g., physical, sexual, psychological).

"These measures are recommended because they have been studied more thoroughly than the other measures, and the results from the studies on these measures show consistently that the measure is a valid indicator of IPV in a relationship," said Alexander.

It is best practice for a couples therapist to evaluate a couple for violence in the relationship before beginning therapy, said Alexander. Based on the level of [violence](#), the types of therapeutic interventions that may be appropriate and helpful for a couple are different. Some studies suggest it is unsafe to conduct couples therapy in certain types of abusive relationships. Having a valid measure to administer at the beginning of therapy can help therapists know whether a couple is experiencing IPV, how severe it is and what types of abuse are occurring.

"This can allow therapists to make the best decisions for how to help the couple—whether that be couples therapy, individual [therapy](#), or taking safety measures to help a victim remove his/herself from a dangerous situation," said Alexander.

Alexander has plans to create her own measure that pulls from the strongest qualities of the existing measures. She also plans to use only the strongest measures that she has identified in assessing IPV in future research and with couples' patients moving forward.

The paper, "Evaluating Measures of Intimate Partner Violence Using Consensus-Based Standards of Validity," was published in *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*.

More information: Erin F. Alexander et al, Evaluating Measures of Intimate Partner Violence Using Consensus-Based Standards of Validity, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/15248380211013413](https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211013413)

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