

Exploring Strategies Used by Victims of Intimate Partner Violence to Increase Sense of Safety: A Systematic Review and Quantitative Study

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Abstract : Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), a significant societal problem, affects individuals worldwide. However, the strategies victims use to keep safe are under-researched. IPV is significantly under-reported, and services often are not able to be accessed by all victims. Thus they are likely to use their own strategies to manage their victimization before being able to seek support. Two studies were completed to understand these strategies. A systematic review of the literature and study completed with professionals who work with victims was undertaken to understand this area. In study one, a systematic review of the literature (n=61 papers), were analyzed using Thematic Analysis. The results indicated that victims use a large array of behaviors to increase their sense of safety and coping with emotions but also experience significant barriers to help-seeking. In study 2, sixty-nine professionals completed a measure exploring the likelihood and effectiveness of various victim strategies regarding increasing their sense of safety. Strategies included in the measure were obtained from those identified in study 1. Findings indicated that professionals perceived victims of IPV to be more likely to employ safety strategies and coping behaviors that may be ineffective but not help-seeking behaviors. Further, the responses were analyzed using Cluster Analysis. Safety strategies resulted in five clusters; perpetrator-directed strategies, prevention strategies, cognitive reappraisal, safety planning and avoidance strategies. Help-Seeking resulted in six clusters; information or practical support, abuse-related support, emotional support, secondary support and informal support. Finally, coping resulted in four clusters; emotional coping, self-directed coping, thought recording/change and cognitive coping. Both studies indicate that victims may use a variety of strategies to manage their safety besides seeking help. Professionals working with victims, using a strength-based approach, should understand what is used and is effective for victims who are unable to leave the relationships or access external support.

Keywords : intimate partner violence, help-seeking, professional support, victims, victim coping, victim safety

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