

**INTERSECTIONS
BETWEEN
EMPLOYMENT
AND SAFETY
AMONG
RACIALIZED
WOMEN**

A LITERATURE REVIEW



ABOUT WOMANACT

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) envisions a world where women are safe and have access to equal opportunities. WomanACT has been providing planning and coordination in Toronto since 1991. Today, WomanACT is a charitable organization working collaboratively to end violence against women through research, policy, education and community mobilization.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Intersections Between Employment and Safety Among Racialized Women project is undertaking research to understand racialized women's experiences in employment and how these are impacted by experiences of gender-based violence. The project will conduct a literature review, conduct community-based research on women's lived experiences and involve key stakeholders in discussions for best practice and solutions. Using this new research, the project will engage key stakeholders, such as employment agencies, employers and community agencies, to develop promising practices and strategies to improve women's access to safe and meaningful employment.

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Prepared by Premila Chellapermal
Edited by Lieran Docherty

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) impacts more than four in ten women in Canada and is comprised of various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual and economic (Cotter, 2018). While both women and men experience violence, women are more likely to experience gender-based violence and are disproportionately impacted by intimate partner violence (Conroy, 2019). This is because gender-based violence is rooted in the unequal power relations between women and men.

Intimate partner violence is directly connected to women's economic security. Research has found that IPV has long term impacts on women's economic security, including impacts on their careers, employment opportunities, and housing security (Coker et al., 2002; Pavao et al., 2007; Postmus et al., 2012). This is in addition to other systemic barriers that contribute to women's economic inequality, such as the gender wage gap. The economic impact of IPV also extends to the wider economy. It is estimated that the annual cost of IPV in Canada is \$7.4 billion (Zhang et al., 2012). Racialized women face increased barriers to economic equality. Racialized women are more likely to be in precarious and low-income employment than non-racialized women (Ng and Gagnon, 2020). These interrelated issues of violence, economic security and race have been highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, over 60% of job losses in Canada were experienced by women (Scott, 2020). In particular, the service and health sectors have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and women, especially racialized women, are overrepresented in these sectors (Block and Galabuzi, 2011).

This literature review is part of WomanACT's community based research project, *Intersections Between Employment and Safety Among Racialized Women in Toronto*. The project seeks to understand the impact that gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence, has on the employment experiences of racialized women[1] in Toronto. The purpose of this literature review is to help inform the direction of the research design and project. The project will undertake primary research with racialized women with lived experience of violence to better understand their experiences of accessing and maintaining employment. The project will also engage key stakeholders, such as employment agencies, employers and community agencies, to develop promising practices and strategies to improve women's access to safe and meaningful employment.

[1] WomanACT uses an inclusive definition of women that recognizes trans women, cis women, non-binary and gender-diverse peoples.

METHODOLOGY

Relevant research was identified through Google searches, journal databases and citation tracing. Key word searches were divided into the domains of employment and intimate partner violence; workplace domestic violence; trauma and employment; race and employment; and race and trauma. Seventy-six articles were reviewed and forty-seven were found to be relevant to the specific research questions. The literature review was guided by the following research questions:

- How does intimate partner violence impact access to employment and job stability?
- What impact does trauma from intimate partner violence have on employment, and how does this intersect with trauma from discrimination experienced by racialized women?
- What are the practices that have shown to improve survivors' access to and engagement in employment? How are the experiences and needs of racialized women accounted for in these practices?

The scope of the literature review was concentrated on articles, reports, and organizational publications from 2000 to 2021 and included research from Canada and other jurisdictions.

Limitations

Although the review made efforts to include the most recent research, the majority of the literature and studies were from more than 10 years ago. In addition, many studies reviewed were from jurisdictions outside of Canada and therefore, may not reflect the experiences in a Canadian context. Lastly, there was limited research that explored the three intersections of trauma, employment and race.



LITERATURE BASE

The literature exploring IPV as a workplace issue is increasing. There are a number of articles that examine the literature base on intimate partner violence and employment. Macgregor et al. (2021) reviewed 32 qualitative research articles; Swanberg et al. (2005) reviewed 96 articles and Adhia et al. (2019) reviewed 18 studies. Some studies have looked directly into the experience of survivors in entering employment and accessing career counselling (Davidson et al., 2012; Chronister et al., 2008) and at the impact of intimate partner violence on job instability and job loss (Riger and Staggs 2004; Tolman and Wang, 2005; Showalter, 2016). Others have looked at the role of workplace policy and intervention (Adhia et al., 2019; Kulkarni and Ross, 2016).

There are a number of primary research studies with large samples that have looked into the relationship between employment and intimate partner violence. Some of the studies include: A Canadian study from 2014, 'How can work be safe when home isn't?' that surveyed 8,429 respondents across Canada on IPV and the workplace (Wathen et al., 2014); a study based in the United States from 2018, 'Dreams Deferred' that engaged 164 participants on the education, career and economic impacts of intimate partner violence (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018); a European wide study from 2019, 'One in three women' that surveyed 6,639 employees (Pillinger et al., 2019) and an Australian study from 2011 that conducted interviews with 3600 union members (McFerran and ADVC, 2011).

Despite the growing research base, there is a lack of exploration on the impact of trauma on employment (Tarshis et al., 2021; Voth Schrag et al., 2019) and limited race analysis on the issues of intimate partner violence and trauma (Crowne et al., 2011; Chronister et al., 2008).

Intimate partner violence and employment status

Literature examining the relationship between intimate partner violence and employment status generally looks at the survivors' ability to work, the impact of intimate partner violence on job loss and the subsequent periods of job instability. Hess and Del Rosario (2018) found that 70% of survivors participating in their study were not able to work due to intimate partner violence.

Employment stability is another way that the impact of IPV on employment can be measured. IPV can impact job stability (Adams et al., 2008), defined as whether someone has been employed consistently over a period time (Showalter, 2016). Job

instability can be the result of job loss or needing to change jobs frequently (Swanberg et al., 2005; Bond and Ulbrick, 2020). It can be caused by disruptions to employment, such as increased risk of violence or stalking, homelessness, or workplace sabotage. The physical and mental health consequences of IPV can have an ongoing impact on employment instability (Riger and Staggs, 2004) with research suggesting that the impact can range in length. For example, it has been shown that IPV can lead to unemployment for periods of up to one year (Pillinger et al, 2019; Hess and Del Rosario, 2018), three years (Riger and Staggs, 2004), and eight years (Showalter, 2016; Crowne et al., 2011).

The literature demonstrates that the relationship between IPV and job stability is complex. Some studies have shown that employment may be a place of safety for women with a correlation found between intimate partner violence and working overtime (Adams et al., 2013). Other studies show an association between intimate partner violence and a loss of hours (Showalter, 2016). Showalter (2016) demonstrates that some survivors still wish to work in spite of their situation or have a necessity to work. Macgregor et al. (2021) found mixed results on the correlation between risk and employment status and acknowledges that the complexities of women's lived realities often leads survivors to have to navigate safety and economic dangers.

Other studies look at IPV and its relationship to job loss. The rate of job loss reported due to IPV in studies ranges from 24% to 53% (Postmus et al., 2012; Hess and Del Rosario, 2018). In addition, in a recent study, Pillinger et al. (2019) found that 30% of those experiencing IPV feared that they would lose a job due to the abuse. Further, a lack of job stability, among other factors, can negatively affect employment and career progression over time (Crowne et al., 2011). Hess and Del Rosario (2018) found that 18% of survivors had missed a promotion due to the abuse they were experiencing and that 38% of survivors had missed out on a career opportunity. Furthermore, a disruption to training and education can impact long-term prospects of career development (Lantrip et al., 2015; Hess and Del Rosario, 2018).

Intimate partner violence and employment sabotage

Another common theme found across literature is the use of employment sabotage as a form of intimate partner violence. Employment sabotage, referred to at times as workplace disruption or interference, describes efforts by an abusive partner to sabotage survivors' employment (Postmus et al., 2018; Postmus et al., 2012; Swanberg et al., 2007). In studies with survivors, prevalence of employment sabotage ranged between 50% to 96% (Showalter, 2016; Alexander, 2011; Hess and Del Rosario, 2018; Postmus et al., 2012). Postmus et al. (2012) found that most sabotage tactics used

prevented survivors from going to work, demanded survivors end their employment or made the experience of employment difficult. Abusers often target employment because it is less in their control, offers a source of financial independence for survivors and is accessible to abusers (Showalter, 2016). Swanberg et al. (2005) categorized employment sabotage as occurring outside of the workplace and in the workplace. Examples of employment sabotage found outside of the workplace include preventing a survivor from going to work through control, threats or restraint (Swanberg et al., 2005), hiding work resources, or inflicting visible injuries (Pillinger et al., 2019). Other examples include increasing domestic care at home (Riger and Staggs, 2004) or interfering with transportation to work (Swanberg et al., 2005). Using children in employment sabotage is another common technique found in literature. This can include a partner's refusal to fulfill childcare obligations, a partner creating fear for children when in their care or a partner placing guilt on a survivor related to not meeting traditional roles of mothering (Thomas et al., 2017; Riger and Staggs, 2004; Swanberg et al., 2007).

Employment sabotage found in the workplace includes excessive phone calls while the survivor is at work, harassing co-workers, physically showing up at the workplace, and stalking near the workplace (Wathen et al., 2014; Pillinger et al., 2019; Swanberg et al., 2007). A study by Wathen et al. (2014) reported that 41% of survivors had received abusive phone calls or text messages at work, 21% had experienced stalking near the workplace, and 15% had their abusive partner contact co-workers and employers. Pillinger et al. (2019) found that 20% of co-workers who were aware of a colleague experiencing IPV had experienced stress or concern about the violence that in turn, impacted their own employment. Co-workers can also be placed in a situation where they have to cover for their colleagues' absences or lack of productivity as a result of the abuse (CAEPV, 2005).

Employment sabotage and disruption can impact job performance as well as lead to absenteeism, job instability and job loss (Wathen et al., 2014; Showalter, 2016; Adams et al., 2008). Hess and Del Rosario (2018), found that women experiencing abuse missed an average of 10 days of work due to the abuse. Tolman and Wang (2005) found that women lost an average of 137 hours a year due to the abuse. The loss of hours can be caused by employment sabotage but also because of other reasons related to the abuse, such as legal and medical appointments (Bond and Ulbrick, 2020).

Intimate partner violence, trauma and employment

Trauma from intimate partner violence and its relationship to employment is less

understood but is potentially a significant factor in survivors' experiences of employment. Intimate partner violence has been shown to have an impact on survivors' mental health, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Coker et al., 2002). Rees et al. (2011) found high levels of anxiety (77%), mood (52%), and post-traumatic stress (56%) disorders among survivors of IPV.

Mental health can impact employment in various ways. Lerner and Henke (2008) found that in the general population, depression increases chances of unemployment and absenteeism. There is also evidence that mental health impacts job performance and progression (Showalter, 2016). Despite limited studies, there is some evidence to show that the effects of trauma impacts survivors' ability to seek and maintain employment (Crowne et al., 2011, Thomas et al., 2017, Riger and Staggs, 2004). The impact of trauma can continue for a significant period of time, with some studies showing that survivors experience the effects of trauma for up to nine years after the end of an abusive relationship (Showalter, 2016). This suggests that trauma can also have long term impacts on job stability and employment.

Intimate partner violence, employment and race

There is limited research on the intersections between intimate partner violence, employment and race (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018; Crowne et al, 2011). Tarshis et al. (2021) discusses the barriers that racialized women who have experienced intimate partner violence face in employment, including less access to meaningful employment due to structural forms of discrimination. Racialized women are also at greater risk of stress and other health challenges because of structural racism that can manifest into experiences of poverty and housing insecurity.

Raj and Silverman (2002) discuss the role that immigration status and the experience of immigration may have on employment or help-seeking for some racialized survivors. For example, survivors with experience of immigration may face additional barriers to accessing support due to isolation, language, as well as a reliance on a partner for immigration status.

Some research has identified differences in perceptions of employment barriers and supports among racialized women (Chronister et al., 2008), such as anticipated barriers to employment and the supports needed to achieve employment goals (Chronister, 2007; Chronister and McWhirter, 2004). For example, racialized women are more likely to perceive needing higher levels of support for employment due to past experiences with racism and structural barriers (Chronister and McWhirter, 2004).

Given the unequal nature of the labour market, the impact of IPV on employment for racialized women is a vital gap in research. The lack of adequate knowledge on how structural inequalities and trauma impact racialized women's experiences in employment can lead to homogenized interventions, and at worse perpetuate unequal patterns of employment. It is also important to recognize that racialized women are not a homogenous group and have intersecting identities which can further work to compound discrimination in employment (Tarshis et al., 2021).

Interventions and responses

Researchers have examined the best practices for supporting survivors of intimate partner violence to access and sustain employment (Davidson et al, 2012; Chronister et al., 2012). These have come in the form of vocational or career counselling, workplace policies and legislation (Chronister et al., 2008; Davidson et al, 2012; Tarshis et al., 2021; Kulkarni and Ross, 2016).

Career counselling

Career counselling, that takes into account the unique barriers faced by survivors, has shown to be beneficial (Chronister et al., 2008; Riger and Staggs, 2004), with evaluations showing positive vocational outcomes (Chronister and McWhirter, 2004). Programs based on Social Cognitive Career Theory were found to lead to successful career intervention for survivors (Davidson et al., 2012; Chronister and McWhirter, 2006). Social Cognitive Career Theory argues that career development is influenced by both personal agency as well as external factors that support or constrain decision making (Lent et al., 1994). This approach is especially appropriate for populations faced with structural inequalities (Davidson et al., 2012). Moreover, it takes into consideration self-efficacy to create behavioural change for a specific outcome, which can be influenced by contextual factors (Davidson et al., 2012). The concept of self-efficacy is particularly relevant to survivors' beliefs in their own capabilities, including in employment, as survivors' confidence is often impacted by the abuse they have experienced (Chronister et al., 2012). Whether the beliefs and goals turn into actual outcomes is then based on the availability of contextual supports, or presence of contextual barriers (Davidson et al., 2012).

The contextual barriers found among survivors include the tactics used by abusers to disrupt or sabotage employment. Other contextual barriers include financial insecurity, safety needs (Chronister et al., 2008), homelessness or unsafe living conditions, and transportation challenges (Bond and Ulbrick, 2020). Contextual barriers were found to be different or compounded for racialized women (Chronister

et al., 2008), with contextual barriers also including discrimination (Tarshis et al., 2021). Relevant supports for survivors of intimate partner violence in career counselling can include community in addition to flexible and individualized plans (Chronister et al., 2008; Davidson et al., 2012). Career counselling programs that focus on the various factors impacting a survivor's financial security can be beneficial (Chronister et al., 2012; Hetling et al., 2016; Tarshis et al., 2021).

Due to the urgent financial and safety needs experienced by survivors, an initial goal to secure income and employment, regardless of whether the employment is considered meaningful, is common (Chronister et al., 2012). Due to structural inequalities in the labor market, where racialized women are overrepresented in precarious and low paid jobs (Ng and Gagnon, 2020), this urgent need for income can perpetuate these inequalities. This can lead to the underemployment of racialized women with experiences of violence. Career counselling that acknowledges the need for immediate income as well as structural barriers could possibly create alternative employment outcomes for racialized women. For example, career counselling could support a survivor to access income support while they are in crisis and resource education or training for future career progression (Chronister et al., 2012).

Workplace policies

The increased recognition of intimate partner violence as a form of workplace violence has led to greater research and improved policy (Adhia et al., 2019; Kulkarni and Ross, 2016). Adhia et al. (2019) found that the most common workplace interventions include identifying signs of abuse, responding to incidents and directing survivors to resources. When workplace interventions were present, positive outcomes for survivors were more likely. Furthermore, research has shown that workplace supports play an important role for survivors (Kulkarni and Ross, 2016; Yragui et al., 2012). Swanberg et al. (2007) found that survivors who received workplace accommodations and supports, such as flexibility to their working hours or a workplace safety plan, were more likely to maintain employment than those who did not receive support.

The workplaces that were most effective in addressing intimate partner violence had policies on prevention, protection and intervention (Swanberg et al., 2007; Kulkarni and Ross, 2016). Written policies, training, screenings, awareness raising campaigns, direct services, and direct referrals to specialist services were seen as some of the more effective interventions (Kulkarni and Ross, 2016). Across literature, survivors placed importance on the process and supports surrounding disclosure practices in the workplace. Disclosures can be accompanied by feelings of shame, stigma and fear of repercussions (Kulkarni and Ross, 2016; Swanberg et al., 2007; Yragui et al., 2012).

Kulkarni and Ross (2016) found that survivors were more likely to disclose to co-workers (46%), followed by supervisors (23%), Employment Assistance Programs (20%), and then human resources (10%). Wathen et al. (2014) found that 54% of survivors disclosing IPV in the workplace had experienced positive outcomes from the disclosures. Interestingly, in Yragui et al. (2012), survivors reported that the outcome most desired from disclosures was confidentiality and to be shown concern. They also reported that they wanted to be treated normally following the disclosure. Survivors reported that they did not want to be provided advice on their wellbeing or relationship. This could perhaps speak to the value that survivors place on trauma informed principles of empathy, confidentiality and respect for choice and agency.

Legislative policies

Several jurisdictions have implemented legislation to address domestic violence in the workplace, including specialized leave for survivors or provisions against discrimination due to workplace violence. All provinces and territories in Canada have domestic violence leave in provincial legislation with Ontario passing amendments to the Employment Standard Act in 2017 and Yukon being the latest province to pass legislation in 2020 (Wilson, 2020). The Canadian Labour Code requires federally regulated workplaces to provide ten days of leave per year for survivors of family violence (Government of Canada, 2019). While research is limited on the use of domestic violence leave legislation and its impact, one Australian study (UNSW, 2015) found that 35% of employers have received a request for domestic violence leave.

DISCUSSION AND GAPS IDENTIFIED

Although literature on intimate partner violence and employment has increased, there is a lack of research on the impact of trauma and race on survivor's employment. Intimate partner violence has a potentially long-term impact on survivors' employment status and career opportunities. This can be due to employment sabotage, disruption to survivors' lives caused by the abuse and the impact of trauma. Intimate partner violence can be associated with absenteeism, performance and job loss.

Racialized survivors face unique and additional barriers to employment because of structural and other forms of discrimination. Studies show that racialized survivors may benefit from specific career counselling interventions that address structural forms of discrimination and experiences of racism. Racialized survivors might face unique barriers in accessing workplace supports, such as workplace domestic violence policies and laws, as racialized women are more often in precarious employment and might perceive or face additional barriers to accessing these policies. More research is needed to understand the contextual barriers to and supports for employment among racialized women who have experienced gender based violence.

Trauma can have a significant impact on employment, although there is limited research on survivor's experiences of trauma in employment. Workplace policies that are trauma informed have been shown to have a positive impact on employment for survivors. However, racialized survivors can face trauma from their experiences of racism, in addition to intimate partner violence. Further research should explore the relationships between these experiences and employment.



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LITERATURE REVIEW

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1652 Keele Street, 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON M6M 3W3
www.womanact.ca

