

Intimate partner violence (IPV) can occur in people of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic classes, levels of education, races and cultures. About one in three women across the world will experience IPV during their lifetime.

What is intimate partner violence traumatic brain injury (IPV-TBI)?

Intimate partner violence traumatic brain injuries (IPV-TBI) are brain injuries that happen during IPV. IPV-TBI is an injury that can change how the brain works. These injuries affect the way a person thinks. They can cause a variety of symptoms, including physical injury to the brain (e.g., bleeding in or on top of the brain). There are different kinds of IPV-TBI, which range in how severe the injuries are. We can see some of them on CT and MRI scans, but cannot see others (e.g., concussion).

What are the causes of IPV-TBI?

IPV-TBI can happen from any blow or outside force to the head, face or neck. It can also happen when a blow to the body causes a sudden jarring or shaking of the head, or from a penetrating injury. Up to 75 per cent of IPV survivors evaluated in emergency departments and shelters say they have experienced a TBI. Up to 92 per cent of survivors of IPV report experiencing blows to the head or face. Choking or strangling can cause brain injury.

“The experience that I’ve had with someone who have come to recognize that they may have a brain injury...overall sense that it is very transformational for them, and it's very empowering for them.”

What are the symptoms of IPV-TBI?

A person does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to suffer a brain injury. Some people may not remember the details of their injury even if they are not knocked out. Here are some common symptoms:

Physical:

- Headaches or head pressure
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Blurred or fuzzy vision
- Sensitivity to light or sound
- Feeling tired or having no energy

Mental:

- Having trouble with memory
- Unable to learn new information
- Having trouble organizing tasks
- Not thinking clearly

Emotional:

- Feeling more emotional than usual
- Easily upset or angered
- Feeling nervous or anxious

Sleep-related

- Sleeping more or less than usual

Some people with more serious brain injuries can feel weakness or numbness in their arms or legs. They can have seizures or trouble with their vision, hearing, walking or speech. Some IPV-TBI survivors have flashbacks or nightmares about their injuries or past trauma. Some people with TBI can be at a higher risk of violence or abuse. It can be hard to recognize an IPV-TBI injury. Sometimes it gets misidentified as mental health challenges or defiant behaviours.

What should I do if I suspect IPV-TBI?

It is recommended that if a person might have a TBI, they should see a medical doctor or nurse practitioner as soon as it is safe. If you think you might have an IPV-TBI, consider going to an emergency department or making an appointment with your primary care provider. They can help you get the care you need and find other services, such as shelters, safety plans, victim services and brain injury support groups.

In Canada, doctors and healthcare providers do not have to report incidents of intimate partner violence to police. But, they do need to contact Child Protective Services if they feel children are at risk of harm.

It is also recommended that you seek help from your local brain injury association. These associations often do not need you to have a formal diagnosis in order for you to use their services. Find your local Community Resources through the Abused & Brain Injured Toolkit: www.abitoolkit.ca

"It should be up to women to have the information and it is up to her what she does with it."

What can happen if survivors of suspected IPV-TBI don't seek medical care?

Waiting to get medical care may have some risks. It can result in symptoms that last longer, permanent disability, or death. If a person is still healing from a TBI and they get another injury to their head, it can be very dangerous. They can have more severe symptoms, symptoms that last a long time or a deadly brain injury.

How long will it take to heal?

The time it takes to heal following IPV-TBI depends on many factors. It can depend on the person's age, sex and gender. It can also depend on any medical conditions they had before the injury (e.g., depression, migraine headaches or a previous brain injury). The severity of the injury, stress, sleep and access to psychological and emotional support and medical care can also affect healing time. No two injuries are the same. Some survivors will recover within weeks or months. Others may experience permanent symptoms or disability that need ongoing care and support.

There are ways to improve a person's health and wellbeing after IPV-TBI, even many years after the injury.

For more information

Speak to your healthcare provider, or visit these websites and/or your local brain injury association:

The Abused & Brain Injured Toolkit:
www.abitoolkit.ca

Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation:
www.braininjuryguidelines.org

Parachute:
www.parachute.ca/concussion

Scan this QR code using your mobile device to visit the ABI Toolkit online:

