

Women Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence

Expectations and Experiences When They Encounter Health Care Professionals: A Meta-analysis of Qualitative Studies

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Background The appropriate response of health care professionals to intimate partner violence is still a matter of debate. This article reports a meta-analysis of qualitative studies that answers 2 questions: (1) How do women with histories of intimate partner violence perceive the responses of health care professionals? and (2) How do women with histories of intimate partner violence want their health care providers to respond to disclosures of abuse?

Methods Multiple databases were searched from their start to July 1, 2004. Searches were complemented with citation tracking and contact with researchers. Inclusion criteria included a qualitative design, women 15 years or older with experience of intimate partner violence, and English language. Two reviewers independently applied criteria and extracted data. Findings from the primary studies were combined using a qualitative meta-analysis.

Results Twenty-nine articles reporting 25 studies (847 participants) were included. The emerging constructs were largely consistent across studies and did not vary by study quality. We ordered constructs by the temporal structure of consultations with health care professionals: before the abuse is discussed, at disclosure, and the immediate and further responses of the health care professional. Key constructs included a wish from women for responses from health care professionals that were nonjudgmental, nondirective, and individually tailored, with an appreciation of the complexity of partner violence. Repeated inquiry about partner violence was seen as appropriate by women who were at later stages of an abusive relationship.

Conclusion Women's perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate responses partly depended on the context of the consultation, their own readiness to address the issue, and the nature of the relationship between the woman and the health care professional.

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