Head Trauma and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Assessing Current Understandings and Moving Towards a Healthier Future

Jackie Mehr | December 9th, 2020
The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women’s Leadership’s website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.
Nearly 3 in 4 women exposed to physical IPV have experienced a partner-inflicted head injury

Source: Valera & Berenbaum, 2003

Head injuries in IPV are inadequately and rarely screened for, causing these injuries to go largely undetected

Source: Goldin, Haag, & Trott, 2016

Untreated head injuries can result in impaired cognition and memory, as well as debilitating chronic central nervous system symptoms (headache, dizziness, etc.)

Source: Campbell et al., 2018
Head trauma in IPV is a widespread issue with devastating consequences.

What can be done to remedy this?
Social Action Project Overview

Aims
- Investigate current understandings of head trauma in IPV held by those working in related fields
- Identify barriers to comprehensive medical care for head injuries in IPV survivors
- Design solutions to address barriers and improve the health outcomes of individuals with partner-inflected head injuries

Methods
- Conduct interviews with individuals working in the head trauma and/or IPV space
- Review current literature on head trauma, traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), IPV, and screening for IPV in medical facilities
- Establish resources to raise awareness on the issue of head trauma in IPV
Interviews and discussions

**Ramesh Raghupathi, PhD**
- Professor of Neurobiology & Anatomy, Drexel University College of Medicine
- Conducts preclinical and clinical research on head trauma

**Sasha Taner**
- Rutgers IWL Program Director and Research Coordinator
- Has 8+ years of experience working in shelters for women exposed to IPV

**Linda Locke, CNM, MPH, LSW, FACNM**
- Founding chair of the NJ Health Cares about Domestic and Sexual Violence Collaborative
- Experienced midwife and social worker

**Reverend Susan Kramer-Mills**
- Executive Director of the Town Clock Community Development Corporation
- Helped establish Dina’s Dwellings, a long-term shelter for IPV survivors
Interviews and discussions (continued)

Gloria Bachmann, MD
- Director, Rutgers Women’s Health Institute
- Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences, RWJMS
- Practicing OB-GYN

Rajni Bhardwaj, DO
- Adjunct Professor, Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Family medicine physician with experience in neuro-musculoskeletal medicine

Eve Valera, PhD
- Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School
- Renowned researcher known for her pioneering work investigating head trauma in IPV
Research

Problem
- A lack of research on how head injuries present in females, because animal models of head injury are almost always male

Solution
- The inclusion of female animal models of head injury
- Education on the public health and social justice implications of research projects

Healthcare

Problem
- A lack of conscious awareness of the intersections between IPV and head trauma
- Inadequate or insufficient screening to detect partner-inflicted head injuries

Solution
- Comprehensive education on the issue of head trauma in IPV
- Whole person medicine

Community

Problem
- A lack of knowledge on symptoms of head trauma
- A shortage of resources to detect and provide care to contribute towards healing

Solution
- Education on signs and symptoms of head trauma
- Allocation of more resources to help support survivors of IPV
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Project Impact

- Interviewed by leading Rutgers journalist
- Video published on YouTube on November 22nd, 2020
- Conversation viewed 70+ times

Courtesy of Calvin Schwartz | Conversations with Calvin; We the SpecIEs
Project Impact—moving forward

Contents
- Overview of head trauma in IPV, synthesizing interview information and published literature
- Subsections with relevant information and suggestions for researchers, clinicians, and community-based workers

Distribution
- Following Completion in spring 2021
- Via individuals interviewed for this project and their affiliated organizations
- Professional societies (Society for Neuroscience, NCADV)

Future Projects
- Updated versions of this report
- Other forms of action for alternative solutions (seminars, fundraisers, etc.)
Feminist Leadership

Leading through listening

Prioritizing empathy and service

Actively combating patriarchal norms
Lessons Learned

Do not be afraid to make asks

There is always more to learn

Every voice matters
References


