



Rate of revictimization exacerbates both dissatisfaction and distrust of police in survivors of intimate partner violence

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ABSTRACT

Frequency of reporting assault crimes to the police has increased recently (Baumer et al., 2010), but half of the cases seen in sexual assault centres are still not reported (Nesvold et al., 2011). Intimate partner violence (IPV) victims' demographic characteristics influence their decision to report IPV to police (Akers et al., 2009). The current research uses data from the Canadian General Social Survey 2009 Victimization Cycle. Responses from 498 IPV survivors who experienced abuse in the past 5 years were analyzed. Some reported the IPV to the police, and some did not. After controlling for demographics, the number of additional victimizations in the past year beyond IPV was significantly positively associated with dissatisfaction with police response. A factor analysis conducted on the reasons why individuals did not contact the police revealed that distrust of police was a significant and meaningful factor. Higher number of victimizations in the past year beyond IPV and lower income predicted distrust of police. Males and older individuals also appear to distrust the police more. Individuals who have been revictimized appear to both distrust and be more dissatisfied with police response. Results are discussed in terms of the potential harm of institutional betrayal.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals who have experienced a traumatic event such as IPV have an increased risk of being retraumatized at a later point in life (Roodman & Clum, 2001). Betrayal traumas such as IPV (in which the perpetrator is someone who has a close relationship with the victim) tend to have more intense negative psychological effects than other types of traumatic events (Freyd, Klest, & Allard, 2005). Frequency of reporting assault crimes to the police has increased recently (Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010), but half of the cases seen in sexual assault centres are still not reported (Nesvold, Ormstad, & Friis, 2011). IPV victims' demographic characteristics influence their decision to report IPV to police (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009). Institutional betrayal occurs when an institution fails to prevent or respond supportively to a traumatic event (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Experiencing more than one previous traumatic event may influence an individual's satisfaction with the police as well as trust in the system.

CURRENT RESEARCH

The current research investigates the factors that predict satisfaction with police action in a sample of IPV survivors. In addition, distrust of police is investigated as a reason for not reporting the IPV incident and the predictors of distrust are determined.

METHODS

- Data from the 2009 Victimization Cycle of the General Social Survey was used.
- Participants were asked whether they had been abused by an ex-spouse/ex-partner in the last 5 years. Those who answered "yes" to this question were re-directed to the questions used for this analysis.
- A total of 498 IPV survivors were interviewed.
 - Of these, 193 had contacted the police following the IPV incident and reported their satisfaction with the action of the police.
 - The remaining 305 participants did not contact the police in regards to the IPV incident. They reported on the reasons for choosing not to report the incident to the police.
- The majority of participants were between 30-49 years of age (>60%). The ratio of females to males was approximately 2:1.
- An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the main reasons that the majority of the participants refused to report the IPV event to the police.
- Direct entry multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine what predicts both dissatisfaction with police response and distrust of police. In each regression analysis, the predictors were demographics (sex, income, education, and age) and the number of victimization in the previous year beyond IPV.

RESULTS

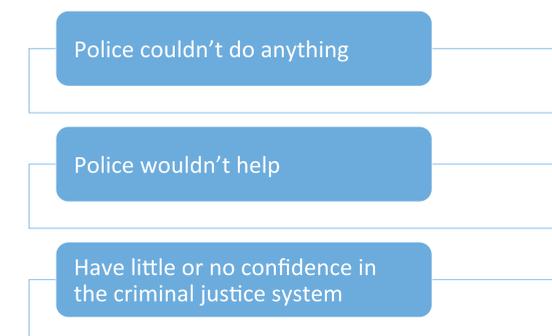
- An exploratory factor analysis revealed that distrust of police is a significant, reliable and meaningful factor contributing to some IPV survivors' refusal to report the IPV incident to the police.
- After controlling for demographics (age, education, income, and sex), the number of victimizations experienced in the previous year beyond IPV significantly predicted individuals' distrust of police. All demographics also significantly predicted distrust of police, such that men, older individuals, and people of lower socioeconomic status reported more distrust. The more instances of victimizations an individual had in the past 12 months, the less likely he or she is to trust police (and therefore did not contact the police to report the current IPV incident).
- After controlling for demographics (age, education, income, and sex), the number of victimizations experienced in the previous year beyond IPV significantly predicted individuals' dissatisfaction with the action taken by police when the current IPV incident was reported.

Multiple regression analyses assessing predictors of distrust and dissatisfaction with police

Outcome	Predictors						
	R	F	Age	Sex	Education	Income	Number of victimizations
					<i>semi-partial correlations</i>		
Distrust of police	.281	4.784**	-.147*	.140*	.118*	.223**	-.121*
Dissatisfaction with police	.358	4.724**	-.104	-.136	.010	.073	.268***

**p<.001, *p<.05

Reasons for not contacting the police resulting in a distrust of police



DISCUSSION

- Individuals who have experienced significant trauma are not only at a higher risk of being retraumatized (Roodman & Clum, 2001), but they are also less satisfied with police action and more distrustful of police.
- Above and beyond the effects of demographics, IPV survivors with a history of more recent victimizations have more negative experiences and negative feelings towards the police.
- These individuals may experience feelings of institutional betrayal related to a perception of failure of police to prevent recurrent victimization. This general dissatisfaction with police action may exacerbate their negative expectations of the police system and prevent them from using police services in the future.
- Additionally, individuals who are most distrustful and least likely to be satisfied with the police are the people who potentially need the system most due to their higher level of victimization.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions for research may involve a direct assessment of feelings of institutional betrayal towards police by IPV survivors. In addition, an investigation of the direct effects of institutional betrayal on the mental health and well-being of IPV survivors could provide a useful avenue of change in the action taken by police and the interaction between police and IPV survivors.

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