

THE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF CUMULATIVE LIFETIME VIOLENCE IN MEN: DISRUPTIONS IN THE CAPACITY TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND FINDING WAYS TO REENGAGE.

PETREA TAYLOR, KELLY SCOTT-STOREY, SUE O'DONNELL, JUDITH WUEST, CHARLENE VINCENT & JEANNIE MALCOLM



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BACKGROUND

Our research focuses on effects of cumulative lifetime violence (CLV). We define CLV as physical, psychological or sexual violence or abuse that occurred during childhood and/or as an adult, as a target and/or perpetrator in many contexts including within the family, community, school, workplace or partner relationships. Quantitative analysis revealed that men with higher levels of CLV reported more symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety. Qualitative interviews were conducted to develop a further, deeper understanding of men's experiences of lifetime violence.

SAMPLE

A sample of 685 participants from Eastern Canada who self identified as men, spoke English and were between the ages of 19 and 35 were recruited for the larger study. From this, 32 men who experienced CLV completed qualitative interviews.

IMPLICATIONS

- Perceptual interference and rectifying detachment were experienced by all men, regardless of whether they were targets, perpetrators, or both, demonstrating the importance of considering cumulative lifetime violence effects on mental health.
- This is important in the treatment of men's mental health as targets may be seen as more worthy of care than perpetrators. As well, it's important for treatment providers to explore all experiences of violence, not only the most recent or glaring.
- This study is unique because the findings are reflective of a community sample of men, as opposed to clinical or justice system sample of men, which is common for violence research.
- Gender role expectations to be self reliant and emotionally independent contribute to men's detachment and may influence their decisions to seek help when mentally unwell. A trauma and violence informed approach can support men who have experienced CLV by being aware of how gender role expectations influence men's mental health and fostering therapeutic relationships through which men feel safe to explore the role of CLV in their lives.

RESULTS

- The effects of CLV on men's mental health are through their relationships with others.
- Men experience detachment, or a disconnection from other people. The main mental health effect of detachment is perceptual interference. The term perceptual refers to how men interpret their environment and interference refers to how CLV disrupts thought processes and men's ability to connect with others. Perceptual interference has varying intensities.
- Men's experiences of CLV sever connections with others, undermining self-worth and leads to distrust and fear of being harmed by others.
- Rectifying detachment helps men remedy disconnectedness by engaging or disengaging with others and can be helpful or unhelpful depending on the level of perceptual interference. For example, disengaging during low levels of perceptual interference involved men's understanding of the negative mental health effects of CVL which helped men identify factors that influenced their thinking, whereas engaging with high perceptual interference may involve attempts to control others to prove men's worth.