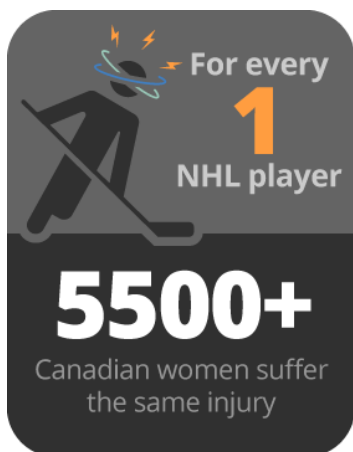


Intimate Partner Violence and Brain Injury

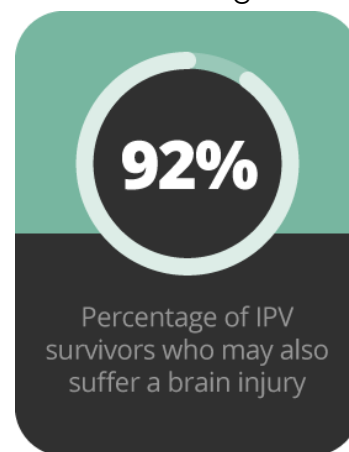
Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a public health crisis, with nearly one in three women worldwide having experienced physical or sexual IPV (Devries et al., 2013). The World Health Organization defines IPV as “any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship”. IPV can include physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, financial and other forms of abuse. It can happen to anyone regardless of socioeconomic, religious, and cultural status (Dicola & Spaar, 2016).

IPV is a public health crisis. In 2017, nearly one-third (30%) of all police reported violent crime in Canada was from IPV, resulting in 96,000 victims in Canada alone (Burczycka, Conroy, & Savage, 2018). Despite these high figures, IPV goes widely underreported. Women in Canada are more likely to be victims of IPV than men. Seventy-nine percent of the victims of IPV are women, and 70% of them report having physical force used against them (Burczycka et al., 2018; Sinha, 2013). From 2009 to 2017, more than half (54%) of IPV resulted in physical injuries (Ibrahim, 2019). Furthermore, it is reported that sixty-seven percent of Canadians know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse in Canada (“Angus Reid Omnibus Survey,” 2012). Furthermore, a woman or girl is killed violently in Canada every two-and-a-half days, in most cases by a male intimate partner or family member (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability) and each night, more than 6,000 women and children sleep in shelters to find refuge from violence (“Shelters for abused women in Canada,” 2014).

Women who experience intimate partner violence are at high risk of also suffering a brain injury. Research indicates up to 92% of women survivors



experience signs and symptoms of traumatic brain injury (Kwako et al., 2011). The U.S. Centres for Disease Control says 2.3% of women will experience a severe episode of IPV every year. If you use that percentage in Canada, that equates to more than 230,000 women who will experience severe IPV every year. If 92% percent of them experience a brain injury from the violence, that is 212,000 women in Canada each year. If you compare that to sports concussion, for every 1 NHL player who acquires a brain injury,



there are approximately 5,500 women in Canada who suffer from the same injury.

Brain injuries are prevalent among survivors of intimate partner violence because the head, face, and neck are areas most likely to be injured in an assault. (Sheridan & Nash, 2007). A traumatic brain injury (TBI), or concussion, can occur from being shaken

violently, thrown down the stairs, and/or being pushed up against a wall. Strangulation is a common cause of brain injury in IPV. Strangulation can cut off the brain's supply of oxygen and nutrients resulting in a brain injury. Sixty-two percent of women who have experienced IPV report being strangled (Wilbur et al., 2001). Strangulation is a red flag and a common indicator of future fatality (Glass et al., 2008).

Survivors of IPV who have experienced a brain injury are at higher risk of multiple, subsequent brain injuries. Multiple traumatic brain injuries can lead to more severe and chronic symptoms of brain injury and can potentially cause survivors of IPV to develop longer term neurodegenerative conditions.

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