

Research highlights link between neighborhood and partner violence

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Dr. Pat O'Campo. Credit: St. Michael's Hospital

People who had more social support, including trust and a sense of belonging, were less likely to experience emotional or verbal abuse while in a relationship, said a study published today in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

This new research also suggests people who were living in a neighbourhood without many social and economic issues were also less likely to experience such abuse.

However, people who participated in community groups such as [women](#)'s or sports clubs, were more likely to have experienced physical [violence](#) at the hands of a partner in the last two years. This finding may be due to the fact that victims who live in neighbourhoods with social and economic disorder reach out because they feel isolated, said Dr. Patricia O'Campo, one of the study's main authors.

"Intimate-partner violence can be an exceptionally isolating experience, and many people are unsure where to go for help," said Dr. O'Campo, director of the Centre for Research on Inner City Health of St. Michael's Hospital. "Some turn to social or church gatherings to overcome their seclusion."

Intimate-partner violence includes emotional, physical and sexual violence, and can affect both men and women. Estimates of experience with intimate-partner violence among women range from 10 to 70 per cent for [physical violence](#), and three to 60 per cent for [sexual violence](#) by a partner globally. Less is known about the worldwide prevalence of inter-partner violence among men.

In the study, more than 2,400 Torontonians were randomly selected and asked to respond a series of questions in face-to-face interviews. Fifty-two per cent were female; 70 per cent were between the ages of 25 and 50. Fourteen per cent had experienced non-physical intimate-partner violence, while eight per cent experienced physical intimate-partner violence in the two years prior to the interview. More women than men had experienced non-physical intimate-partner violence - a finding that was unsurprising, said Dr. O'Campo, a social epidemiologist.

"The prevalence of lifetime violence is unacceptably high for women," said Dr. O'Campo. "It's preventable, and we, as a society, must invest more in the kind of co-ordinated services women need to stay safe."

Dr. O'Campo said her research draws attention to the need for more co-ordinated services to ensure women have access to the proper supports to get back on their feet.

"Nine times out of ten, these women have multiple issues that need to be dealt with at once," said Dr. O'Campo.

"They need housing, child care, their mental health needs addressing and they often require employment-related assistance. But often, these issues are dealt with one at a time."

She also said more attention needs to be focused on intimate-partner violence in men. "This can only help inform and bolster community based interventions to address this challenging and complex issue," she said.

Dr. O'Campo was also the lead author of a study published in May in *Housing Studies* that highlighted the need for housing stability as a major concern for women who were living with their abusive partner, who had recently left, and who had long left their partners. "Safety,

stability and control vanish as soon as emotional and physical abuse enter the picture," said Dr. O'Campo. "The home suddenly becomes a main source of stress and danger."

Both papers, she said, attempt to show how violence affects many aspects of people's lives. "We should be doing more to prevent this problem," she said.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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