

Conclusion

A fresh approach to prevention, identification, and accountability of intimate partner sexual violence perpetrators

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A problem inadequately named cannot be adequately addressed.
(Carol J. Adams, *I just raped my wife!*
What are you going to do about it, Pastor?)

We raise our daughters to look for rapists in parking lots, in dark alleys, and in crowded bars. Seldom do we tell them: look in the movie seat next to you where your boyfriend holds your hand; look across the altar to the man who is saying his wedding vows to you; look at the father of your newborn baby, smiling in your hospital room. And yet, these may be the rapists who will damage their lives. These may be the rapists who are held in high esteem in the community, who tell people their partners are crazy, who are given a wink and a nod as they describe forced sex, who seldom spend a night in jail, and who generally fly under the radar of our social institutions.

Who are these men and why did we write a book about them? The answer is simple: communities, governments, and programs will not end victimization by focusing only on survivors. Perpetrators commit the acts, and learning about perpetration is the only path to effective prevention and intervention. When we ignore those who perpetrate intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV), we ignore our best chance for preventing a huge proportion of sexual assaults. We miss the chance to identify a significant risk of death to women who are in relationships with physically violent men who also sexually harm them. We also ignore the pain and distress of children who are exposed to a toxic atmosphere of sexual oppression as they grow up. And, while we focus solely on their victims/survivors, partner rapists evade accountability for their crimes.

In considering perpetrators, it is wise to avoid “either/or” thinking: either they are monsters, or they are damaged human beings; either they are individually responsible, or this is a social problem; either practitioners provide treatment, or they engage the criminal justice system; either the focus is on

addressing the underlying factors that fuel perpetration, or on educating our communities about safety.

The range of contributions in this book point to an alternative lens – instead of the “either/or” perspective, we see from a holistic and flexible perspective the value of a “both/and” view. These perpetrators commit monstrous acts, and they are indeed human beings; learning about their motivations and psychological characteristics does not mean that we excuse their behavior. We can look at the social context of IPSV while holding perpetrators personally accountable. We can research effective interventions, often in the context of treatment mandated by the courts. We can and must provide community education, while also working to eliminate the societal factors that fuel gender-based violence in general, and IPSV in particular.

The basic concepts for addressing IPSV, as outlined below, are distilled from the experts who have contributed to this book. Each chapter adds to the picture of what constitutes IPSV and what we can do about it.

Step one: Shifting our focus

As one of the primary needs of victims is for their sense of justice and fairness to be restored in so far as possible, holding the perpetrator to account is a core aspect of serving the victim. It also serves the needs of society and ultimately the long-term good of the perpetrator.

(Ireland's *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*)

The focus must shift to perpetrators and their impact. Survivors are often a “convenience sample” for researchers. Only a tiny fraction of IPSV offenders enter the criminal justice system or seek treatment on their own. Researchers and practitioners need to develop innovative ways to reach men and boys in the general population who believe that they “own” the women and girls in their lives and have carte blanche to force, coerce, or manipulate them into unwanted sexual activity.

This does not mean, of course, that the needs of survivors and their children should be overlooked. Robust efforts to help with healing and recovery are critical, and resources should not be diverted from programs to support survivors. Yet in many cases, the reality is that the perpetrators will remain in the lives of these survivors and children, or will move on to other relationships with the potential for victimization; therefore, including perpetrators in our efforts to create change is vital.

Step two: Learning to recognize IPSV in all its forms

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator

attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure no one listens.

(Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*)

The next step is to clearly recognize and identify what constitutes IPSV and what strategies abusers may use, as we have done in several chapters of this book. Their tactics may range from emotional pressure to engendering fear of death. For decades, people have been asking domestic violence survivors "Why do you stay?" Similarly, there is a lack of understanding (by both community members and professionals) of the dynamics of IPSV and the reasons why an adult would remain in a relationship with a sexual abuser. The harrowing survivor stories in this volume are there for a reason: they illuminate the many ways in which sexual violence is manifested in intimate partnerships.

IPSV can take place both in the context of a physically violent relationship, and also as a stand-alone form of abuse. This knowledge is important because remedies that address only those perpetrators who are also batterers will miss those who use other forms of coercion, manipulation, and force.

Step three: Looking at the big picture

Rape culture is a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women.

(Emilie Buchwald, *Transforming a Rape Culture*)

A number of contributors have provided examples of how perpetrators are condoned by individuals and institutions. From peer support for "scoring" sexually to indifference from the courts, perpetrators and potential perpetrators get the message that it is no big deal to sexually abuse a partner.

A particularly disturbing trend is the upsurge in violent, misogynistic pornography that normalizes sexual violence and teaches young people a callous disregard for emotional connection and mutual respect in sexual relationships. In the absence of comprehensive sex education, this is how many adolescents learn about sexuality and intimate relationships.

We cannot single out perpetrators for study and intervention without looking at the cultures in which they live. IPSV is a worldwide problem that is rooted in oppressive attitudes and institutionalized gender bias.

Step four: Requiring accountability

Requiring accountability while also extending your compassion is not the easiest course of action, but it is the most humane, and, ultimately, the safest for the community.

(Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*)

Effective interventions must be identified and developed. These men live in our communities. Very few of them will spend any significant amount of time in prison. They may still be loved by their partners and their families. They are fathers and brothers and sons as well as husbands and boyfriends.

Innovative curricula for batterer intervention programs are a promising start. Because of the prevalence of sexual assault by domestic violence perpetrators, all batterer intervention programs should include a focus on sexual respect and consent, along with the more broad-based learning about gender-based violence. In addition, sexual offender treatment programs should evaluate and address sexual violence against partners, past or present, regardless of whether IPSV was the proximate cause for entering treatment. Since most perpetrators who receive treatment do so because they are court-ordered, judges and community corrections officers need to know about appropriate interventions for IPSV, along with mental health professionals and substance abuse treatment providers. IPSV perpetrators have specialized treatment needs, and more research needs to be conducted to determine the most effective interventions.

Accountability also means better training for law enforcement, to ensure thorough investigation of possible IPSV and a prepared response when sexual assault is disclosed. Multidisciplinary community teams that include law enforcement, advocates, and prosecutors minimize trauma to victims, and make prosecution more likely. Both criminal and family court personnel must also receive adequate training so that perpetrators can be held accountable and their partners and children can be protected.

Step five: preventing IPSV through community action

Human nature is complex. Even if we do have inclinations toward violence, we also have inclination to empathy, to cooperation, to self-control.

(Steven Pinker)

We need to raise our children in an atmosphere of respect and safety. The messages young people get throughout childhood and adolescence are relevant to reducing the risk of perpetration and victimization. Accurate and age-appropriate information about sexuality, reduction and effective treatment of trauma to children, measures to promote gender equality, clear expectations of respectful behavior, and reasonable consequences for any form of sexual aggression are common-sense methods for reducing the prevalence of IPSV.

Religious congregations and schools are among the community institutions that can stand strong against IPSV by making it clear that this behavior is not to be tolerated and by connecting individuals with community resources. They can provide broad-based education about equality and consent, along with sanctions for those who jeopardize individual and community safety through sexual violence.

It is our hope that the perspectives, information, and insights provided by this book will assist readers, no matter what their professional or community role, in taking the necessary steps forward to reduce the perpetration of intimate partner sexual violence.

Each of us should be safe in our own homes, in our own beds, and in the lives we share with our partners. It is up to everyone, from parents of young children to judges in all nations' highest courts, to work toward the elimination of intimate partner sexual violence.

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