

## **Service Providers' Perspectives: Reducing Intimate Partner Violence in Rural and Northern Regions of Canada**

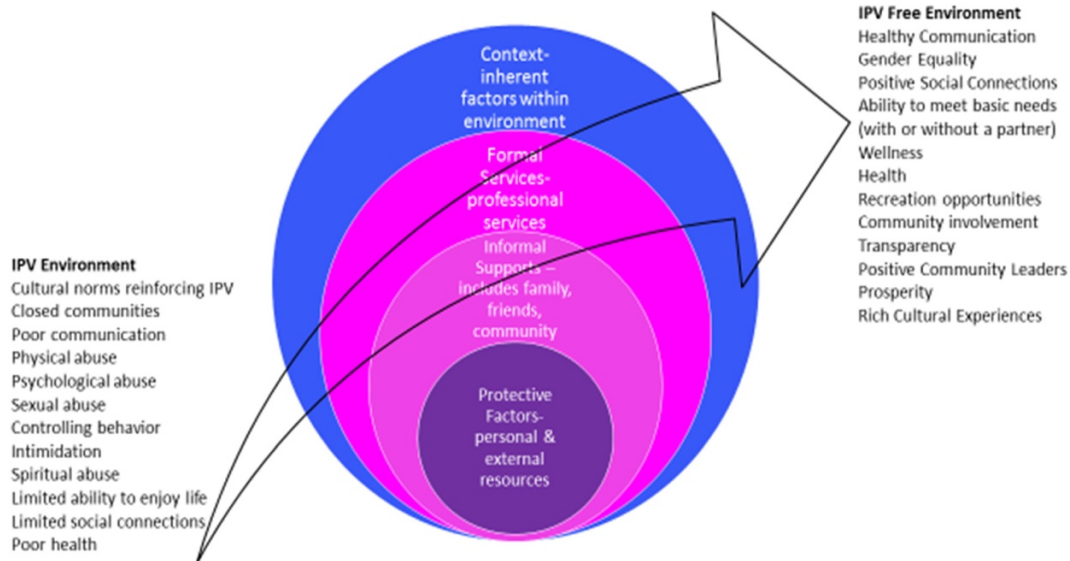
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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global health crisis and a fundamental violation of human rights, with approximately one in three women worldwide having experienced forms of violence, IPV being the most common (WHO, 2021). In Canada, IPV claims a woman's life approximately every six days, with indigenous women disproportionately affected at almost six times the rate of non-indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022). A high percentage of Canadian women experience physical or sexual assault by an intimate partner, and thousands of women seek shelter annually due to IPV, with thousands turned away due to shelters being overfull and under-resourced (ACWS, 2023). Many women suffer severe injuries from IPV, leading to long-term physical, mental, and reproductive health issues. Emphasizing the underreporting of cases, high prevalence rates, and the significant impacts of IPV, there is an urgent need for comprehensive interventions.

Despite research in urban areas, understanding IPV in rural and northern communities remains limited, especially in terms of community responses (Letourneau et al., 2023). **RESOLVE Alberta** conducted a study between 2016 and 2017 aimed at increasing the understanding of the experience of IPV service providers working in rural and northern regions of Alberta, specifically examining barriers and gaps that exist in understanding effective responses. The following is a summary based on a 2023 publication (Letourneau et al., 2023).

We conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups, with a total of 55 participants or service providers, including shelter services, victim's services, The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Counselors, and others, many whom had over ten years of experience assisting women affected by IPV (Letourneau et al., 2023). A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data, followed by the creation of a theoretical framework. These findings were illustrated in the schematic below that conceptualizes the challenges service providers face, depicting transitions from IPV to IPV-free environments (Letourneau et al., 2023).

Creating and Sustaining Non-violent Communities in Rural and Northern Canada



Four overarching themes (Letourneau et al., 2023) were identified to facilitate transitions to an IPV-free environment:

1. *Contextual factors within the IPV environment*: revealing the intersections of how community diversity, environment, and geography are experienced by service providers. These diverse communities included indigenous women, partners of men temporarily employed in the coal, oil, and gas industry, women living on farms, immigrant and refugee women, and members of the LGBTQ community.
2. *Formal or professional services*: particularly emphasizing the provision of safe shelters, the need for collaboration among service providers, and for integrated case management services.
3. *Informal support or connections with family, friends, and community*: emphasizing the need for social connections, the quality of rural and northern life, community values that prioritize zero tolerance for IPV and promote gender equality, and the importance of IPV education.
4. *Protective factors or activating personal and external resources*: factors that women experiencing IPV can enact to alter their situation include self-assessment, empowerment, and awareness of resources. Service providers also highlighted the importance of facilitating problem-solving.

These themes form a theoretical framework for understanding service provision and implementation. Service providers encourage social media use in service delivery to improve communication, lobby for rural-specific IPV specialists, and recognize isolation as a barrier to seeking safe shelter and housing, transportation, and economic assistance (Letourneau et al., 2023). They emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach of culturally sensitive interventions, accessible shelter options, and knowledge dissemination and access. To address the complex challenges faced by women experiencing IPV, the results from this study (Letourneau et al., 2023) suggest that we must support service providers, document service gaps, and maximize policy change and community action based as it is experienced in rural and northern regions of Canada. By addressing these key areas, service providers aim to mitigate the risks and stressors faced by women experiencing IPV in rural and Northern Alberta, ultimately working towards enhancing their safety, well-being, and access to support services.

For more information on RESOLVE Alberta please visit their website at <https://nursing.ucalgary.ca/research/resolve>

To read the full report of this research study, please visit:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10061610/#:~:text=Conclusion,and%20north ern%20regions%20of%20Canada>. or [10.1177/08445621221128857](https://doi.org/10.1177/08445621221128857)

## References

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