

VA WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH NETWORK

Supporting Practice and Research Collaboration

Spotlight on Women's Health Cyberseminar Series

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Experience among Women Veterans: An Overview of the State of the Research

Sponsored by the VA Women's Health Research Network

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Today's Speakers



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Speaker



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Health Equity Research and Promotion
Associate Professor, Social Work, School of
Public Health, Temple University
Speaker

Today's Discussant



LeAnn Bruce, PhD, LCSW

**National Program Manager, Intimate Partner Violence
Assistance Program (IPVAP)**

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Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Experience among Women Veterans: An Overview of the State of the Research

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National Center for
PTSD
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

 **CHOIR**
Center for Healthcare Organization
and Implementation Research

CHERP
CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY
RESEARCH AND PROMOTION
VA HSR&D CENTER OF INNOVATION



TODAY'S AGENDA

Scope of the problem among women Veterans

- Definition and types
- Prevalence and risk factors
- Health and social impacts

Healthcare system response

- Women Veterans' perspectives on screening and response
- Women Veterans' insights on psychosocial intervention to promote recovery & healing
- Recovering from IPV through Strengths and Empowerment (RISE)

Ongoing research and evaluation

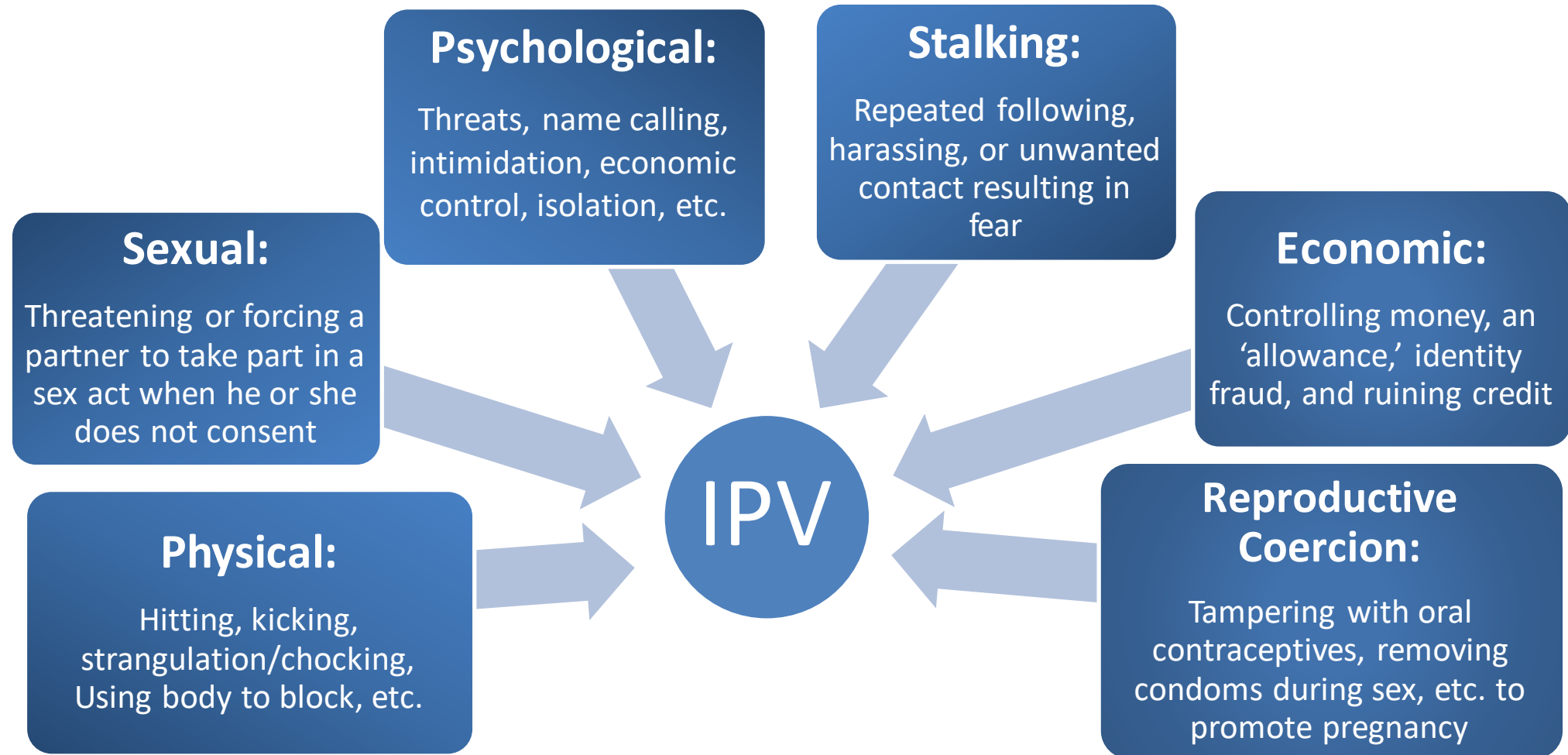
Discussion of implications by Dr. LeAnn Bruce

Q&A



IPV DEFINITIONS AND TYPES

Physical violence, sexual violence, stalking or psychological aggression (including controlling and coercive acts) from a past or current intimate partner



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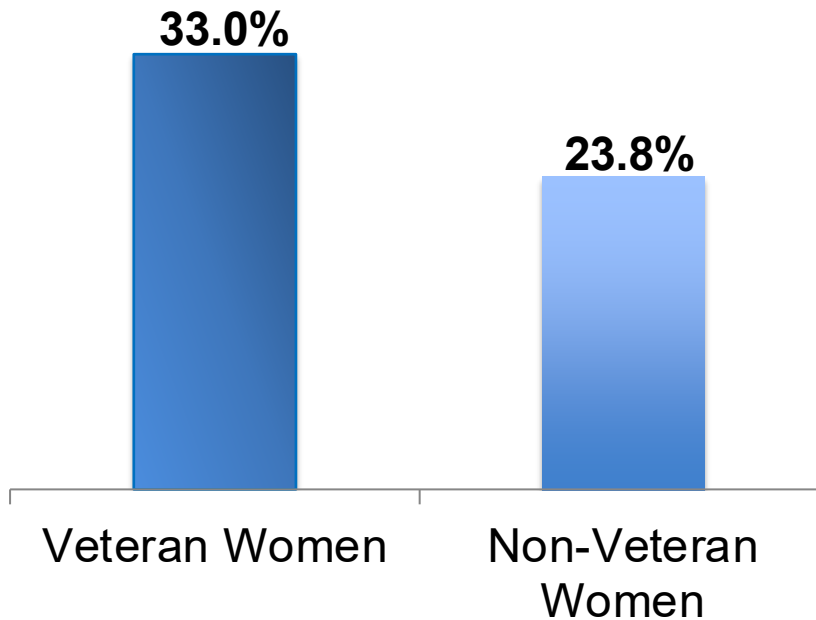


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IPV Prevalence and Risk Factors among Women Veterans



IPV IS COMMON AMONG WOMEN VETERANS



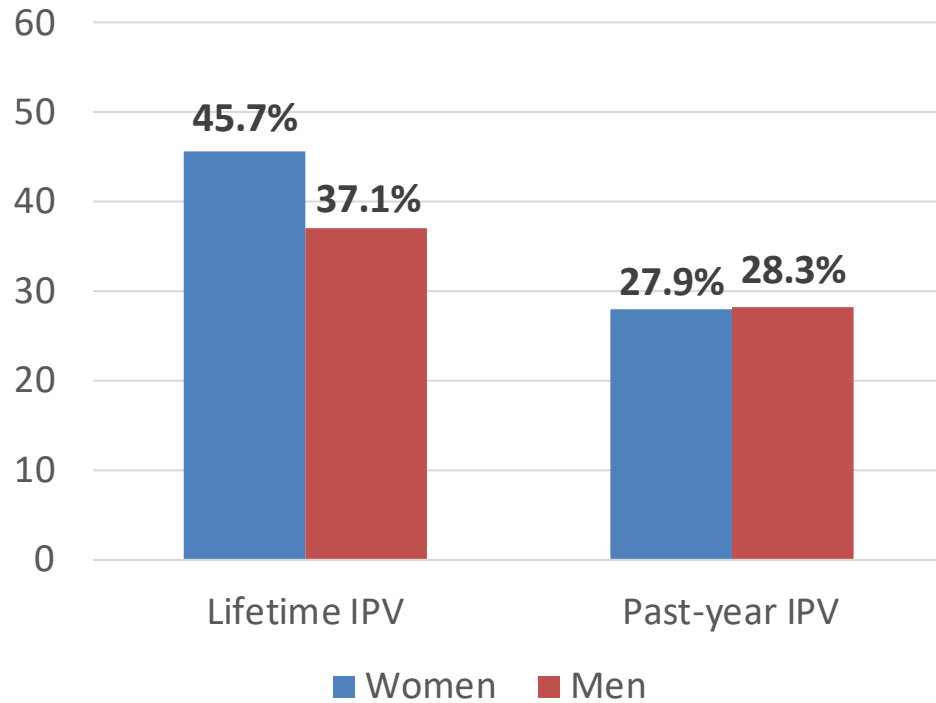
Women Veterans are 1.6 times more likely to experience IPV during their lifetime compared to women who never served in the military





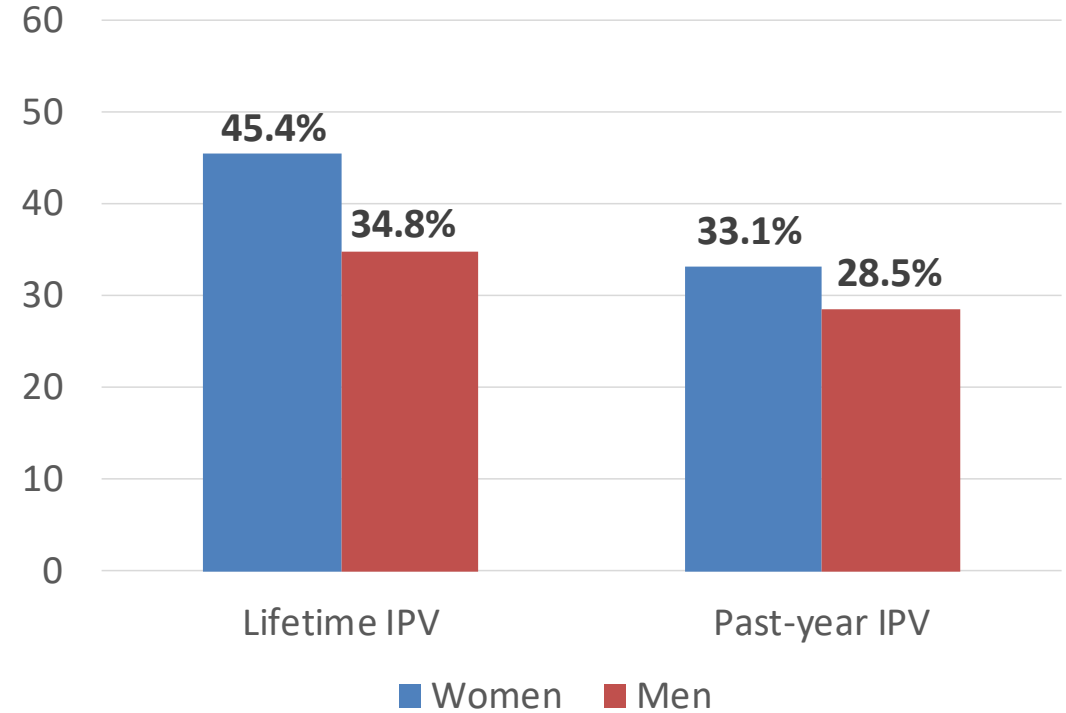
RECENT PREVALENCE ESTIMATES

Veterans of All Service Eras (N =1187)



*Lifetime: OR = 1.38, CIs: 1.04, 1.82
Past-year: OR = 0.95, CIs: 0.70, 1.28

Recently Separated Post-9/11 Veterans (N =1494)



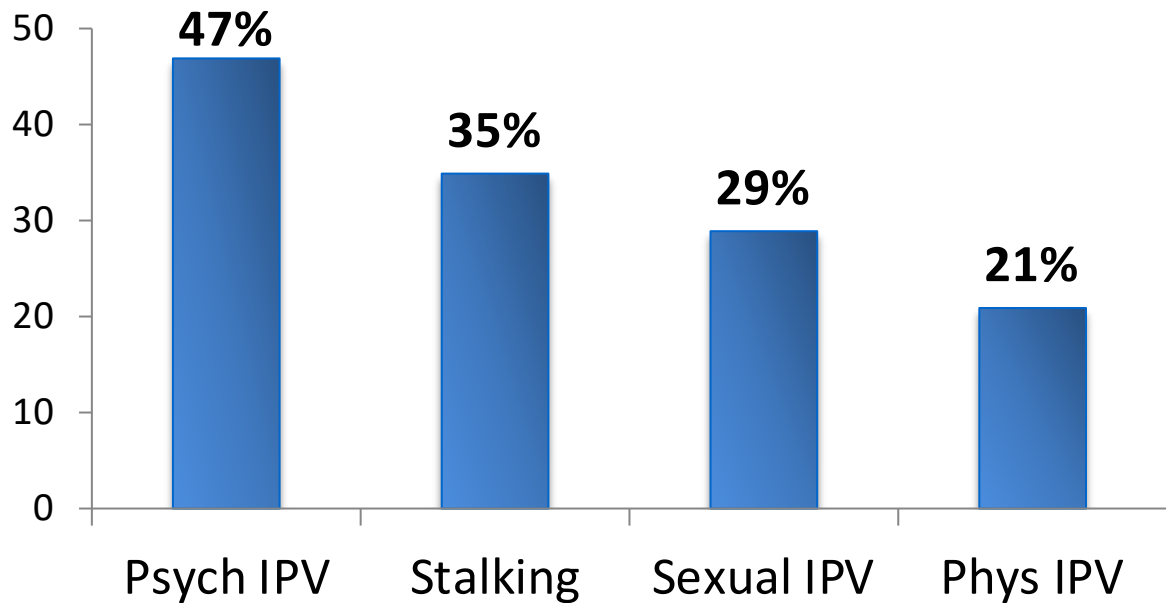
*Lifetime: OR = 1.60, CIs: 1.25, 2.04
Past-year: OR = 1.24, CIs: 0.95, 1.61



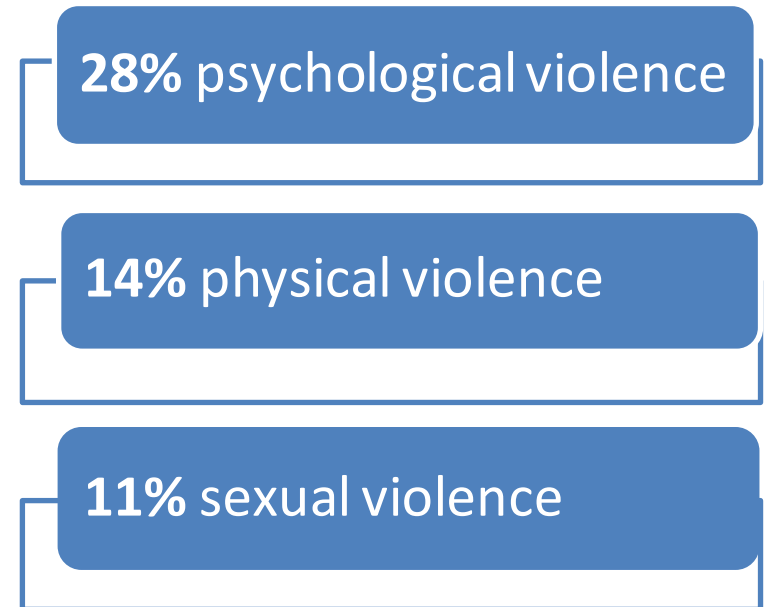
TYPES OF IPV EXPERIENCES

National sample of women Veterans – 55% experienced any IPV during their lifetime and 30% experienced IPV in the past year¹

Types of IPV experienced during lifetime*



Types of IPV experienced during the past year*



*IPV types are not mutually exclusive

Iverson, Wiltsey-Stirman, Street et al. (2016). *General Hospital Psychiatry*.



FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED RISK FOR IPV AMONG WOMEN VETERANS

Younger age^{1-4*}

Lesbian or
bisexual
orientation^{3,4,10,14}

Financial
hardship³

Housing
instability/home-
lessness^{3,5,11}

Military sexual
trauma^{2,3,6,13}

Childhood sexual
abuse⁶

PTSD and
depression
symptoms^{7,8,12}

Low self-efficacy
and personal
empowerment^{8,9}

Can be impacts and risk factors

¹Iverson, King, Resick et al. (2013). *J. of General Internal Medicine*; ²Dichter, Haywood, Butler et al. (2017). *American J. of Preventative Medicine*; ³Kimerling, Iverson, Dichter, et al. (2016) *J. of General Internal Medicine*; ⁴Dardis, Shipherd, & Iverson (2016). *Women & Health*; ⁵Iverson, Sayer, Meterko, et al. (2020). *J. of Interpersonal Violence* ⁶Iverson, Mercado, Carpenter, et al. (2013) *J. of Traumatic Stress*; ⁷Iverson, Rossi, Nillni, et al. (2022). *International J. of Environmental Research and Public Health*; ⁸Webermann, Dardis & Iverson (2022). *J. of Traumatic Stress* (2022); ⁹Dardis, Dichter, & Iverson (2018). *Psychiatry Research*. ¹⁰Webermann, Dardis,, Shipherd, et al. (2023). *J. of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*; ¹¹Montgomery, Sorrentino, Cusack, et al. (2018). *American J. of Preventive Medicine*; ¹²Iverson, Dardis, Grillo, et al. (2019). *Comprehensive Psychiatry*. ¹³Relyea, Portnoy, Combellic et al. (2020). *J. of Family Violence*. ¹⁴Iverson, Livingston, Vogt et al. (2024). *J. of General Internal Medicine*.

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IPV Health Impacts Among Women Veterans



PHYSICAL HEALTH CORRELATES AND OUTCOMES

- Injury, including concussions / traumatic brain injuries¹⁻⁴
- Poorer physical health¹⁻⁷
- Functional impairment^{1,6,7,11}
- Migraines and chronic pain⁸⁻¹¹
- Infectious diseases²
- Digestive system disorders²
- Hypertension⁷
- Diabetes⁷
- Pregnancy and perinatal health impacts^{12,13}

¹Iverson & Pogoda (2015). *Medical Care*; ²Dichter & Marcus (2013). *Military Behavioral Health*; ³Iverson, Dardis, & Pogoda (2017). *Comprehensive Psychiatry*; ⁴Iverson, Dardis, Grillo, et al. (2019). *Comprehensive Psychiatry*; ⁵Iverson, King, et al. (2013). *JBIM*; ⁶Iverson, Vogt, Maskin, et al. (2017). *Medical Care*; ⁷Gibson, Bahorik, Xia, et al. (2023). *JBIM*; ⁸Dichter, Marcus, Wagner, et al. (2014). *Social Work in Mental Health*; ⁹Mahoney, Shayani, & Iverson (2022). *Psychiatry Research*; ¹⁰Goldstein, Jakubowski, Huang, et al. (2023). *Menopause*; ¹¹Kim, Currao, Fonda et al. (2022). *J. Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*; ¹²Rosenfeld, Miller, Zhao et al. (2018). *American J. Obstetrics and Gynecology*; ¹³Creech, Pulverman, Kroll-Desrosiers, et al. (2021). *J. of General Internal Medicine*.



MENTAL HEALTH CORRELATES AND OUTCOMES

- PTSD^{1-4,8,9}
- Depression^{3,5-9}
- Anxiety^{3,4}
- At-risk drinking / alcohol use disorders^{3,4,7,10-12}
- Substance use disorders^{12,13,14}
- Sleep disturbances^{12,13,16}
- Eating disorders^{3,15}
- Suicidal ideation and behavior^{4,16}
- Mental health multimorbidity^{3,7}

**IPV is an
experience, not
a diagnosis or
mental health
condition**

¹Pierce, Fonda, Milberg et al. (2022). *J. Interpersonal Violence*; ²Dardis, Amoroso, & Iverson (2017). *Psychological Trauma*; ³Dichter, Sorrentino, Bellamy et al. (2017). *J. Traumatic Stress*; ⁴Kim, Currao, Fonda et al. (2022). *J. Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*; ⁵Dichter & Marcus (2013). *Military Behavioral Health*; ⁶Dichter, Marcus, Wagner, et al. (2014). *Social Work in Mental Health*; ⁷Iverson, Vogt, Dichter, et al. (2015). *J. of American Board of Family Medicine*; ⁸Iverson, Vogt, Maskin et al. (2017). *Medical Care*; ⁹Iverson & Pogoda (2015). *Medical Care*; ¹⁰Iverson & Mahoney (2020). *J. Women's Health*; ¹¹Gobin, Green, & Iverson (2015), *Substance Use & Misuse*; ¹²Iverson, Dardis, Grillo et al. (2019). *Comprehensive Psychiatry*; ¹³Gibson et al. (2023). *J. of General Internal Medicine*. ¹⁴Iverson, Sayer, Meterko et al. (2020). *J. Interpersonal Violence*; ¹⁵Bartlett, Iverson, & Mitchell (2017). *International J. of Eating Disorders*. ¹⁶Brignone, Sorrentino, Roberts et al. (2018). *General Hospital Psychiatry*



IPV IS ALSO ASSOCIATED WITH...

- Employment-related difficulties (e.g., absenteeism)¹
- Difficulties with reintegrating into civilian life^{2,3}
- Lower perceived social support²
- Economic / financial stress^{3,4}
- Housing instability / homelessness^{3,6,7}
- Future IPV experience^{8,9}

¹Maskin, Iverson, Vogt et al. (2019). *Psychological Trauma*; ²Kim, Currao, Fonda, et al. (2022). *J. Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma*; ³Iverson, Sayer, Meterko, et al. (2020). *J. Interpersonal Violence*; ⁴Dichter, Marcus, Wagner, et al. (2014). *Social Work in Mental Health*; ⁵Kimerling, Iverson, Dichter et al. (2016). *J. of General Internal Medicine*; ⁶Dichter, Wagner, Borrero, et al. (2017). *Psychological Services*; ⁷Montgomery & Dichter (2018). *American J. of Public Health*; ⁸Mahoney & Iverson (2020). *J. of Women's Health*; ⁹Iverson, Rossi, Nillni et al. (2022). *International J. of Environmental Research and Public Health*.



HEALTH SERVICE USE

Women Veterans who experience IPV use a higher volume of VHA care across a range of services (compared with women Veterans not experiencing IPV), including:

- Primary care^{1,2}
- Emergency room care² (both for medical problems and mental health care for women with severe physical IPV)³
- Mental health visits²⁻⁴

Healthcare visits present opportunities for intervention



¹Kimerling, Iverson, Dichter, et al. (2016). *JGIM*; ²Dichter, Sorrentino, Haywood, et al. (2018). *JGIM*; ³Iverson & Pogoda (2015) *Medical Care*. ⁴Creech, Pulverman, Kroll-Desrosiers, et al. (2021). *JGIM*.

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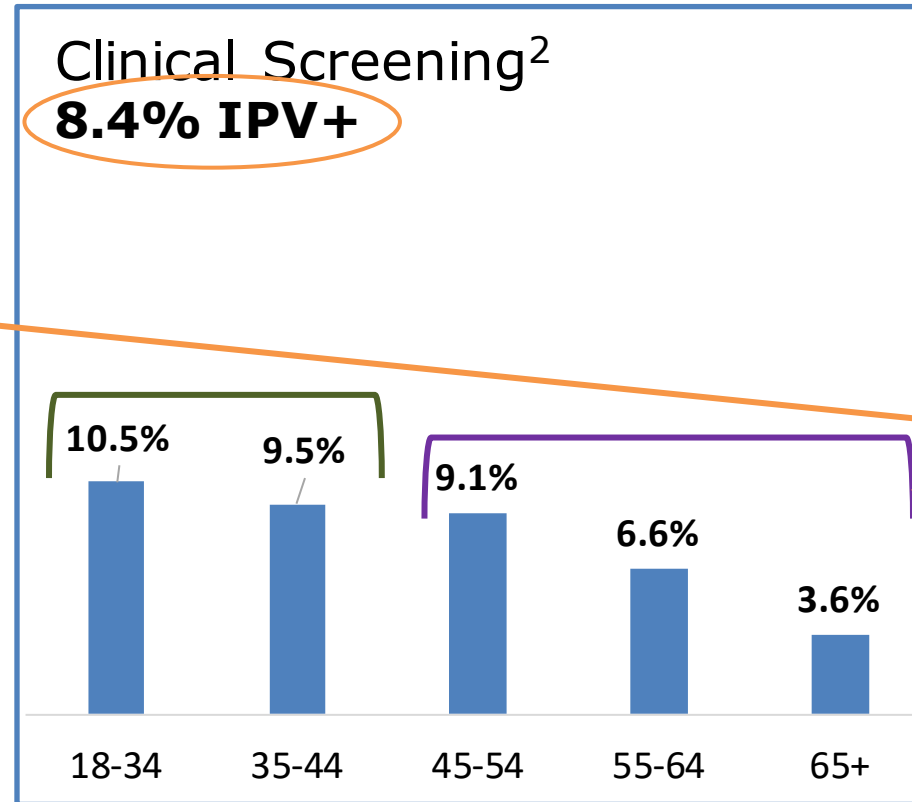
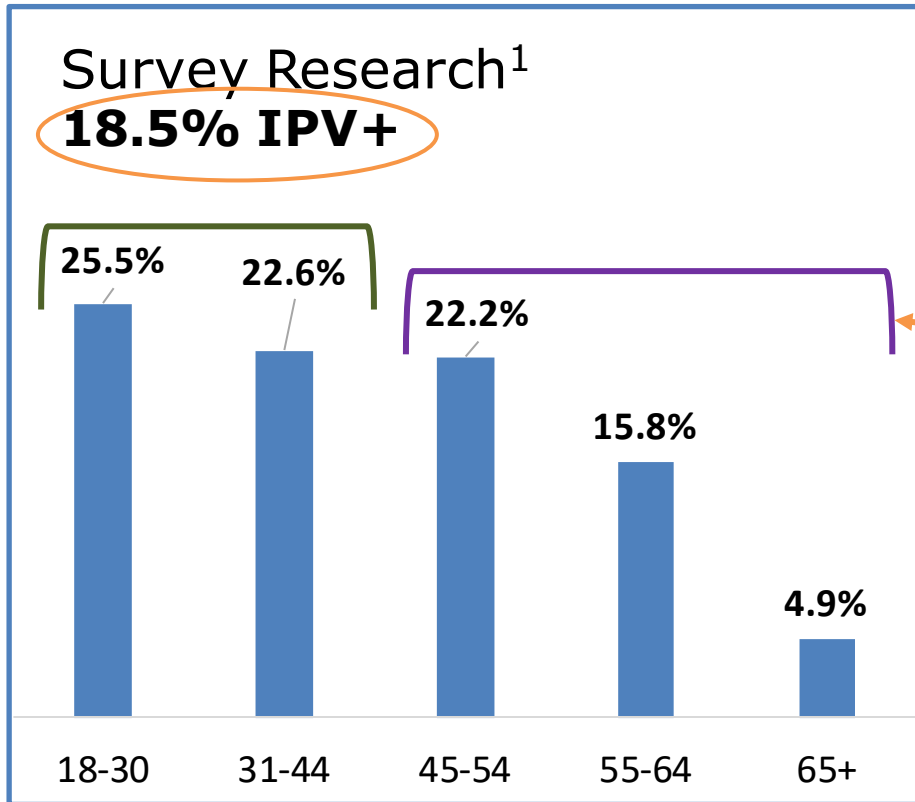
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Women Veterans' Preferences for Care: What Women Veterans Tell Us About IPV Screening and Response



PREVALANCE OF PAST-YEAR IPV: SURVEY RESEARCH VS CLINICAL SCREENING DISCLOSURE RATES

Women Receiving VHA Care, by Age (years)



Clinical screening
≠ prevalence

IPV does not end
after
reproductive age

¹Kimerling, Iverson, Dichter et al. (2016) *J. of General Internal Medicine*; ²Dichter, Haywood, Butler, et al. (2017). *J. of Traumatic Stress*.



IPV SCREENING AND INQUIRY

Acceptability and desirability **if** it is done in a **trauma-informed** way¹⁻⁵

- *Quality* of interaction – patient-centered and trauma-informed
 - Making it safe to disclose
- *Quantity* of inquiry – routine, and more than once, but not without care
- Recognize barriers to disclosure
 - Fear of safety and/or repercussions for self/partner/children
 - Lack of trusting relationship with the provider
 - Not ready to disclose/seek help
 - Shame, stigma, and/or embarrassment
 - Privacy, and documentation concerns
- Respond with sensitivity and offer to help

“It’s a private matter. It’s an embarrassing situation.”

¹Iverson, Huang, Wells et al. (2014). *Research in Nursing & Health*.²Dichter, Wagner, Goldberg et al. (2015). *Women’s Health Issues*. ³Dichter, Ogden, Tuepker et al. (2021). *J. of General Internal Medicine*. ⁴Dichter, Makaroun, Tuepker et al. (2020). *J. of General Internal Medicine*. ⁵Tuepker, Newell, Sorrentino et al. (2023). *J. of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*.



THE QUALITY OF THE CLINICAL INTERACTION MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Women need to feel that they can trust the clinician – lack of comfort or trust will inhibit disclosure.

“They’ve got to show me that they’re a human being first before I would even go there. ...If I got a new primary physician tomorrow and if he asked me about that, I probably wouldn’t tell him anything. But once I had seen him a couple of times, then I would, at some point....It’s like I’ve got to wait to test them. To see whether, do I want to trust this person with this?”

It is important to feel that the clinician cares, not just asking because they have to.

“The whole time, her head was down typing or writing and it was like, why are you asking me these questions? It’s not like you even care as to what the answer is. You’re just doing it because this is something you have to do. You have to ask these questions.”



THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDER RESPONSE

Inadequate or inappropriate clinical response can lead to harms (e.g., shame, self-blame, mistrust, minimization, avoidance of future disclosure or help-seeking)¹⁻⁴

- *“You can't make the woman answer...but if she tells you and you don't follow up, then in the back of her mind, she's saying, Well, I told them and they don't seem to care...I guess it's just like he says. I deserve it.”¹*
- *“When I go to the women’s health... it come to the question are you experiencing any physical violence at home from a partner or someone, which I say yes, and that’s it. They just document it in the computer. And I don’t get nothing from the doctor, no domestic, like you said, counselor or nothing like that. That’s it[so] – I stopped telling him because I mean I don’t see what the point of saying it.”²*

There must be a notable and compassionate response to any disclosure¹⁻⁴

- Non-judgmental and connected/’tuned in’
- Sensitive acknowledgement and validation
- Offer education and information about resources and referrals
- Optimize safety and privacy (e.g., patient-centered documentation)
- Respect for autonomy and self-determination

¹Iverson, Huang, Wells et al. (2014). *Research in Nursing & Health*. ²Dichter, Makaroun, Tuepker et al. (2020). *J. of General Internal Medicine*; ³Dichter, Ogden, Tuepker et al. (2021). *J. of Women’s Health*. ⁴Tuepker, Newell, Sorrentino et al. (2023). *J. of Aggression, Maltreatment, and Trauma*.



DISCLOSURE TO A SUPPORTIVE AND CARING CLINICIAN CAN FEEL VALIDATING AND EMPOWERING

“It felt good [to talk about it]. I felt embarrassed, but it probably was the right time for me to let somebody know what was going on with me.”

“When she called me back [to the room], she patted my knee and asked me how I was and how are things at home. ... I didn’t feel like I was interrogated. It just felt my best friend asking me, “Okay, what’s going on with you?” So I think it’s the person, I think it’s the way the questions are set up, and it’s the presentation. ...I feel like I’m talking to people who honestly care who have been my friends for a lifetime and I’m able to be open and honest....if you make things where people feel like they’re interrogated, then we’re less likely to say anything. Because it’s like okay, how are you going to look at me, what are you going to write about me, what are you going to think about me, what are you going to say about me. All these things run through your head, so then it makes you worry about what you’re gonna say. But if you have that right person, it makes it comfortable to talk about it. Because believe it or not, we all wanna talk about it but it has to be the right person.”



THE VHA AS A CRITICAL POINT OF CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

“When a Veteran has nowhere else to go, they come here. When people need or have an emergency, they come here. When people are hungry – Veterans, they come here. When they have a secret, they come here. When they wanna talk to another Veteran, they come here. This is a home away from home. This is home to them.”

“[My VA primary care provider] was so great. When she realized how bad things really were, she immediately got on the phone. She talked to the social worker, told her how much it was a dire necessity for me to see her. The social worker fit me right in that same day. I went to talk to the social worker...She made me feel absolutely comfortable .”



DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

- Benefit: documentation of experience, continuity of care
- Concern: privacy, confidentiality, safety
 - Privacy/stigma → non-disclosure
 - Safety → increase in violence, decrease in healthcare access
- Recommendation: transparency and patient engagement in decisions around documentation – discussion about rationale for and concerns about documentation

“One of these young interns... he brought up the discussion of something that I had discussed with my psychiatrist in privacy... Then I come to find out that any staff member that has a computer can put in my last 4 [digits of my Social Security Number], can read my record. What privacy is that? So after that I was very skeptical... I ain't talking to you if you're typing it up into the machine.”

“My provider, everything I say to her goes on the record... She's mandated to put everything in the record, she says.... That's a huge alarm. You're gonna put that in a record of the VA with me? No you're not, because I'm not gonna tell you any of it.”



ADDRESSING IPV IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES / PSYCHOTHERAPY

- IPV is not, itself, a mental health condition, yet IPV is associated with myriad mental health impacts (e.g., depression, anxiety, and PTSD, unhealthy substance use and suicidal ideation), and many women Veterans who experience IPV also use or want mental health services¹
- Women Veterans may need and want both IPV services and mental health care – services may be disconnected²
- Women Veterans express wanting:³
 - To be able to address their experiences with IPV in the psychotherapy context
 - To have flexibility and self-determination about whether, how, and when to discuss their experiences with IPV
 - Mental health clinicians to understand the dynamics and complexities around IPV and individual contexts and to support them in making decisions (for treatment or actions) that are right for them

¹Dichter, Haywood, Butler et al. (2017) *J. Prev. Medicine*. ²Dichter, Iverson, Montgomery et al. (2023). *J. Agg. Malt. Trauma*; ³Sorrentino, Iverson, Tuepker et al. (2021). *Psychological Services*.

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Recovering from IPV through Strengths and Empowerment (RISE)



RISE WAS DEVELOPED BASED ON WHAT WE LEARNED FROM WOMEN ABOUT WHAT THEY NEED AND WANT

Individualized brief counseling intervention

- Transdiagnostic

Rooted in principles of empowerment and trauma-informed care

- Fosters patient voice and choice
- Sensitive to trauma history and ongoing abuse

Variable length

- Up to 8 sessions based on patient's preference and needs

Modular

- Key areas from the IPV literature and our formative research

Incorporates Motivational Interviewing

- Collaborative and non-judgmental
- Values-driven goal setting

Targets

- Empowerment (i.e., taking control over your own life and making positive decisions based on what you want)
- Self-efficacy (i.e., optimistic self-beliefs to cope with an array of difficult events in life)

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO FOCUS ON?



Safety Planning

Ways to increase your safety, and that of any children and pets, in different situations, like in an argument or if you are thinking about leaving the relationship through a written worksheet.



The Health Effects and Warning Signs of IPV

Understanding the effects of trauma and IPV on different parts of your life (for example, your physical, mental, and social health, and the well-being of your children). Understanding Warning Signs of IPV, including red flags in partners and the difference between aggressive behavior and assertive behavior



Improving Coping and Self-Care

Learning about and practicing self-care strategies and ways to relax when you are stressed.



Enhancing Social Support

Learn and practice how to approach friends or family and ask for support.



Making Difficult Decisions

A written exercise that may help you think about your options and make decisions if you are thinking about making a change in your relationship.



Resources and Moving Forward

Learning about resources available in the community for a variety of topics (like housing, employment, legal aid, and restraining orders). Reflect on things you've accomplished and plan ahead for life's ups and downs by identifying red flags to watch out for and ways to RISE up and cope.



Sexual Violence Over the Lifespan

Recognize different forms of sexual violence that are commonly experienced by individuals who experience IPV and make the connection between experiences of sexual violence and health.



GROWING EVIDENCE BASE FOR RISE

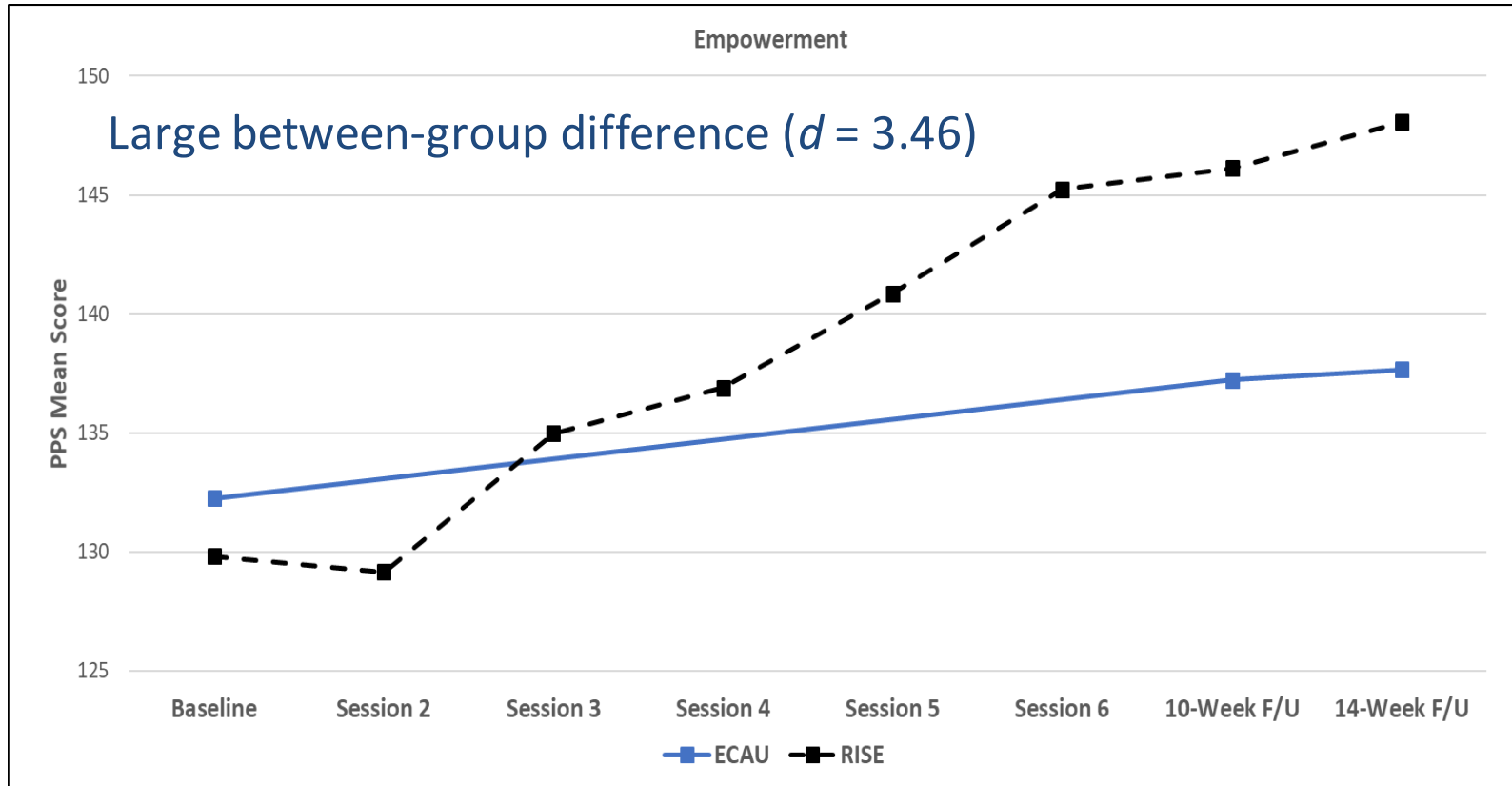
- Developed and refined incorporating research and feedback at every step of its development and evaluation to increase the likelihood timeliness of implementation¹⁻⁴
 - Focuses on outcomes of paramount importance to people experiencing IPV
- RCT established effectiveness of RISE compared to an advocacy-based enhanced care as usual (ECAU) in VHA condition^{5,6}
- Evidence of clinical effectiveness in routine care based on early and ongoing program evaluation findings (e.g., self-efficacy, depression symptoms, valued living)⁷
 - Evidence of similar effectiveness and satisfaction for patients of different gender identities
- Perusing grant funding for larger multi-site comparative effectiveness RCT with attention to effectiveness by gender

¹Iverson, Stirman, Street et al. (2016). *General Hospital Psychiatry*; ²Danitz, Stirman, Grillo et al. (2019). *BMC Women's Health*; ³Grillo, Danitz, Dichter, Driscoll et al. (2021). *J. of Interpersonal Violence*; ⁴Iverson, Danitz, Driscoll et al. (2022). *Psychological Services*; ⁵Iverson, Danitz, Shayani et al. (2022). *J. of Clinical Psychiatry*. ⁶Shayani, Danitz, Low, Hamilton, & Iverson (2022). *Int. J. of Environmental Research & Public Health*; ⁷Iverson, Danitz, Low, Knetig, Doyle, & Bruce (2022). *International J. of Environmental Research and Public Health*.



KEY RCT FINDINGS

RISE is highly effective at improving personal empowerment (PPS-R)

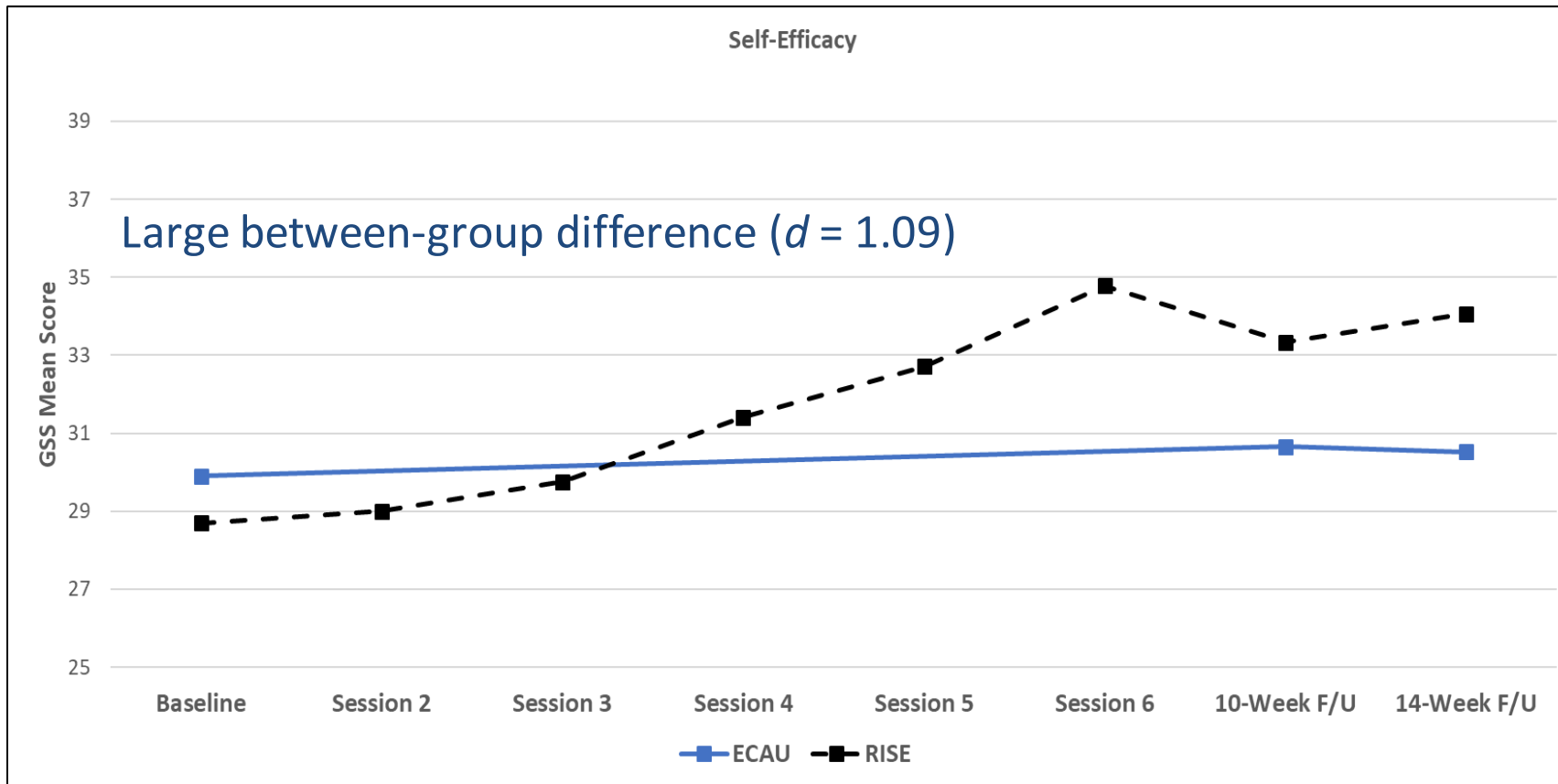


Empowerment – Taking control over your own life and making positive decisions based on what you want



KEY RCT FINDINGS

RISE is highly effective at improving self-efficacy (GSS)



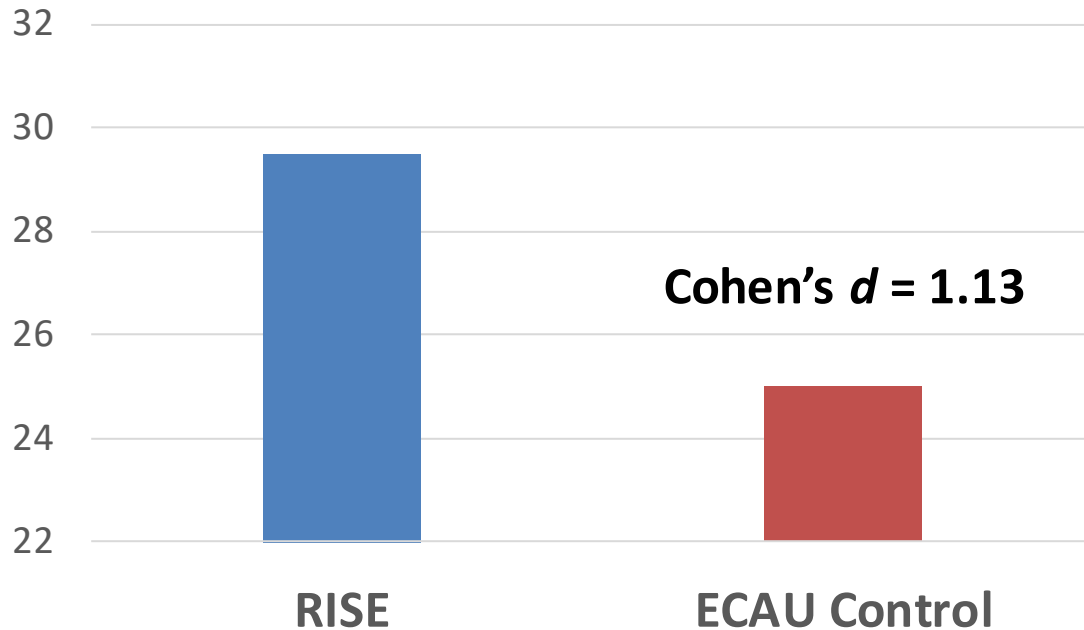
- RISE also improves:**
- Valued living
 - Psychological distress
 - IPV experience

Self-efficacy - Optimistic self-beliefs to cope with an array of life difficulties



KEY RCT FINDINGS

Satisfaction with Treatment (CSQ-8)



"It was very helpful...it was empowering for me to feel that I have more control over things I can work through."

- Woman Veteran

"Often with survivors of IPV, we see that they haven't had much control in their relationships, so being able to provide an intervention that sort of gives them the control and power to choose what to work on at the get-go is really valuable."

- Primary Care Social Worker



CAN WOMEN VETERANS ACCESS RISE IN VHA?

Partnership with IPV Assistance Program to disseminate and implement (D&I) RISE Pre-implementation (2020-2022)

- Piloted implementation with IPVAP Coordinators at five VA Medical Centers
- Revised RISE for inclusivity and fit for broader VHA population¹
 - Gender-neutral; Sexual violence module; Expanded to up to 8 sessions for increased flexibility
- Piloted revised training and consultation model and certification process (i.e., to promote fidelity) with multiple clinicians across clinic types at three VA Medical Centers

Implementation via RISE D&I Team (2022 and beyond)

- Began implementing nationally with IPVAP Coordinators and other clinicians (2022)
- Launched RISE Regional Trainer Program (2023)
- Spreading the intervention while promoting sustainment among certified RISE clinicians (2024)

¹Iverson, Danitz, Low et al. (2022). *Inter J. Environmental Research and Public Health*.



WHERE ARE WOMEN VETERAN VHA PATIENTS RECEIVING RISE?



Recent Metrics:

- 103 VAMCs offering RISE
- ~75% of RISE patients identify as women

 = Sites with Certified Providers

 = Sites with Clinicians in Consultation

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Ongoing Research / Evaluation



CURRENT VA-FUNDED RESEARCH, QUALITY IMPROVEMENT, & PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Evaluation of implementation facilitation for enhancing uptake of IPV screening programs in women's health primary care clinics¹
- Development and initial evaluation of bi-directional IPV screener and a novel individualized intervention for IPV use (including bidirectional IPV)²
- Evaluation of expansion of IPV screening and response for patients of all ages and genders seen within a wide array of clinics³
- IPV Assistance Program Innovation Hub - Center for Implementation, Research, and Evaluation⁴
- RISE D&I Team (75%-78% of RISE patients in VHA are women)⁵
- Additional studies and QI initiatives on IPV use and prevention among veterans and families that include women Veterans and studies on various topics that include measures of IPV experience (including funding by VA CSR and non-VA sources such as DoD)

¹Iverson & Miller VA HSR SDR 18-150; ²Portnoy VA HSR CDA 19-234; ³Portnoy VA QUERI PEC 23-182; ⁴Portnoy & Presseau (Directors) VA IPVAP Partnership; ⁵Iverson (Director) VA IPVAP Partnership with Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for PTSD



FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

- IPV, health, and health care needs among understudied /underrepresented groups
 - LGBTQ+, BIPOC, etc.
- Dissemination and implementation of best practices
 - Improve clinician knowledge acquisition, efficacy, and uptake of evidence-based screening and interventions and their fidelity to the models (i.e., trauma-informed care)
 - Screening for suicide risk and social health issues
- Optimizing coordination of care within VHA and the community
 - Integration of IPV and suicide prevention, homelessness, employment support services etc.
 - Education of community partners regarding women Veterans and bidirectional referrals
- Innovations in making knowledge about IPV and services more accessible
 - Reducing stigma about getting help
 - Increasing strategies for Veterans to learn about IPV and services that do not depend on screening



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- VA Office of Women's Health
- VA Women's Mental Health
- VA IPV Assistance Program

The research presented does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.

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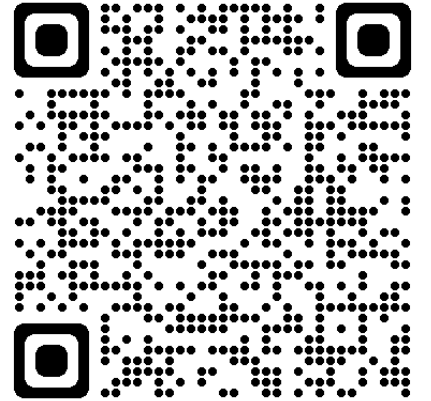


U.S. Department
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