

A BETTER WAY TO MEASURE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: THE COMPOSITE ABUSE SCALE REVISED-SHORT FORM (CASr-SF)

BACKGROUND

A limitation of current approaches to measuring intimate partner violence (IPV) in Canada has been reliance on questions, in national surveys, that focus on individual acts of violent or aggressive behaviours ranging from single experiences of relatively low severity acts (such as name-calling and shoving) to frequent experiences of severe violence (such as strangulation and stalking). A failure to acknowledge that IPV occurs in patterns and a lack of attention to the context in which violence happens has led to a “de-gendering” of IPV which means that services and policies are not developed to take into account how different groups and individuals may experience IPV.

The Composite Abuse Scale Revised-Short Form (CASr-SF) is a comprehensive measure developed and tested in Canadian and international samples that provides robust assessment of lifetime and past-year IPV experiences.

PURPOSE

The overall research questions for this project were:

1. How does the CASr-SF perform in a population-based sample of Canadians?
How does it compare to questions traditionally used in such surveys based on the Conflict Tactics Scale?
2. How should the CASr-SF be scored to allow classification of IPV experiences by severity?
3. How do Canadians of different genders and other characteristics report experiencing IPV and its impacts?
4. How do IPV experiences relate to other experiences of violence, and to physical and mental health and well-being?

*The CASr-SF measures
the full range of IPV
experiences & patterns
of abuse among
different genders.*

METHOD

We examined the performance of the CASr-SF using data from the Statistics Canada 2018 Survey of Safety in Public & Private Spaces (SSPPS). Exploratory factor analysis was used to assess how items grouped according to specific types of IPV, allowing us to determine the sub-scales of the CASr-SF. Latent class analysis (LCA), which groups people in the sample according to their responses to CASr-SF items, was used to determine patterns of abuse – i.e., how individuals’ abuse experiences clustered into different groupings by type and severity of abuse experienced. The LCA results were further used to develop a scoring classification approach, which allowed us to determine the prevalence of IPV overall and by specific sub-groups. Correlations and cross-tabulations were used to compare CASr-SF items to items used in Canada’s General Social Survey-Victimization (GSS-V) to determine whether both sets of questions are needed to describe Canadians’ experience of IPV.

For information on the CASr-SF and to obtain permission to use it, please visit:
<https://violencegenderandhealth.ca/what-counts-is-what-gets-counted/>

How to cite this document:

Wathen, C. N., Ford-Gilboe, M., Perrin, N., Scott-Storey, K., O'Donnell, S., Varcoe, C., MacGregor, J. C. D., & Khan, A. (2022). *A Better Way To Measure Intimate Partner Violence: The Composite Abuse Scale Revised-Short Form (CASr-SF)*. London, Canada. Available at gtvincubator.uwo.ca

KEY FINDINGS

1. The CASr-SF identifies 3 types of IPV and works well for different genders

The CASr-SF identifies 3 sub-types of IPV: psychological, physical and sexual abuse. These types are the same for both men and women; analyses according to non-binary or other gender identities was not possible due to small sample sizes. This is a pressing research gap.



2. The CASr-SF allows us to differentiate between more and less severe experiences of IPV, and report how many Canadians experience IPV at these different levels

An ongoing concern in the IPV measurement literature has been tools that include both more serious and ongoing forms of violence perpetrated by one partner against the other (sometimes called 'intimate partner terrorism'), along with single or intermittent, often bi-directional forms of aggressive behaviour in relationships (sometimes called 'situational couple violence'). These are different phenomenon that require different service and policy responses.

The CASr-SF helps us pull these apart and understand who is experiencing what level of IPV. We identified three scoring categories, based on how much of each of the 3 types of IPV are reported (more details are available [here](#)).

A purple arrow-shaped graphic pointing to the right. On the left side, the number '3' is written vertically in a large font, with the words 'SCORING CATEGORIES' written vertically next to it. To the right of the arrow, there are three bullet points describing the scoring categories.

- **IPV Positive:** meets threshold criteria, meaning, in the past year, a score above 1 out of 30 for any act of physical violence, OR a score above 0 out of 10 for any act of sexual violence, OR above 4 out of 40 for any act of psychological violence; in addition, any score above 0 on the choking/strangulation item means the person is IPV Positive, regardless of other scores.
- **Subthreshold IPV:** a non-zero score that does not meet the above threshold criteria
- **No IPV:** true zeros – no CASr-SF items are endorsed for past year experiences

Past year experiences of Canadians 19 years and older:

An infographic with a rounded rectangular border. On the left, it states 'We found that the following were more likely to be IPV Positive:' followed by a list of demographic and social factors. In the center, it shows '3.0% IPV Positive'. On the right, it shows '5.4% Subthreshold IPV' and '91.6% No IPV'.

We found that the following were more likely to be IPV Positive:

- women
- Indigenous Peoples
- non-visible minority respondents
- those born in Canada
- those facing economic difficulties in the past year
- those reporting any employment in the past year

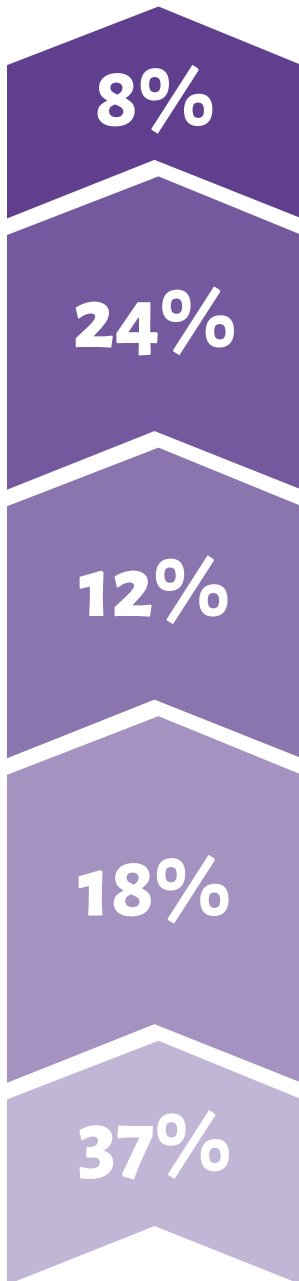
3.0%
IPV Positive

5.4%
Subthreshold IPV

91.6%
No IPV

Different forms of interpersonal violence are highly inter-related and affect health, especially mental health:

- All forms of non-IPV violence experiences across the lifespan including childhood assault and exposure to violence in the home, and non-partner sexual and physical assault since age 15, were strongly related to past-year IPV experiences.
- All forms of mental health concerns – post-traumatic stress and depressive symptoms, anxiety - were strongly related to past-year IPV experiences; the same was true for specific physical (e.g., back problems) and chronic health concerns.



pattern 5

intense on all types of abuse

pattern 4

higher intensity psychological abuse and coercive control including stalking, harassment, higher levels of insults and isolation

pattern 3

psychological and physical abuse, including hitting, throwing, shaking, grabbing, insults, put downs and harassment

pattern 2

a mixed pattern of psychological and sexual abuse where the most dominant items relate to forced sex, sexual humiliation, sexual and other insults, harassment and isolation

pattern 1

lower intensity psychological abuse, characterized mainly by insults

3. The CASr-SF identifies 5 patterns of IPV, and shows that men and women experience it differently

Among those who reported IPV, five distinct patterns of IPV experiences, with increasing levels of severity, are described below, along with the percentage of respondents experiencing each pattern.

Patterns by gender, age and impact

- These patterns are highly gendered, with more women than men in pattern 1, 2 and 4 and more men in pattern 3. The most severe pattern (5) contained twice as many women as men.
- Age was also important; those who experienced low levels of psychological abuse (pattern 1) were older, while those experiencing sexual abuse (pattern 2) and the most severe forms of abuse (pattern 5) were younger.
- Worse mental health was associated with the more severe patterns, as were more types and/or frequency of abuse overall; for example patterns 5 had an average CASr-SF total score 10 times higher than pattern 1.

4. The CASr-SF is a comprehensive way to assess IPV experiences

- When we compared the CASr-SF items to those modified from the GSS-V we found that the CASr-SF captures all relevant information about abusive experiences. So, when the CASr-SF is used, the GSS-V is not needed.
- The CASr-SF also captures unique aspects of IPV in the areas of stalking, isolation from family and friends, sexual coercion and forced sex, financial abuse, and choking/strangulation.

CASr-SF ITEMS

My partner(s):

- Blamed me for causing their violent behavior
- Tried to convince my family, children or friends that I am crazy or tried to turn them against me
- Used or threatened to use a knife or gun or other weapon to harm me
- Shook, pushed, grabbed or threw me
- Made me perform sex acts that I did not want to perform
- Followed me or hung around outside my home or work
- Threatened to harm or kill me or someone close to me
- Forced or tried to force me to have sex
- Harassed me by phone, text, email or using social media
- Told me I was crazy, stupid or not good enough
- Hit me with a fist or object, kicked or bit me
- Kept me from seeing or talking to my family or friends
- Confined or locked me in a room or other space
- Kept me from having access to a job, money or financial resources
- Made comments about my sexual past/performance
- Choked me

Response Scale:

Has this ever happened to you?
(Yes/No)

IF YES, how often did it happen in the past 12 months?

Not in the past 12 months | Once | A few times | Monthly | Weekly | Daily/almost daily

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

For policy and program development:

- Policy and program development must consider differential experiences and consequences of IPV among different groups, taking an intersectional approach.
- We recommend that the scoring approach outlined in this report to classify respondents according to their level of IPV severity be used to develop policies and services tailored to people's violence experiences, as well as their individual needs and contexts. This means recognizing that:
 - people classified as "IPV Positive" are generally experiencing ongoing physical, sexual and/or emotional violence with commensurate health and social impacts, including on income and work. Interventions designed for these people must be -trauma- and violence-informed, survivor-centric and prioritize safety and survivor agency.
 - people in the "Sub-threshold IPV" category may require very different interventions that focus on healthy relationship behaviours.

For measuring and reporting on IPV experiences:

- The CASr-SF is a robust standalone measure of IPV experiences that differentiates, among Canadian adults, patterns of abuse experiences and distinguishes IPV from lower-level aggression or conflict.
- The CASr-SF captures variation in IPV across important dimensions, including gender, age, financial strain and other aspects of identity, and related health concerns.
- We recommend asking survey respondents about the gender of the partner(s) responsible for, especially, past-year IPV, as we know from other research that perpetrator gender is an important consideration, especially when assessing IPV severity and patterns of abuse.
- We strongly recommend over-sampling respondents with gender identities that are not "man" or "woman"; small cell sizes precluded release of these data by Statistics Canada.