

Understanding the Domestic Violence Epidemic

Public Perceptions and Paths to Prevention in Peterborough City and County

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SOCI-4570Y: Community-Based Research Project with the Peterborough Domestic Abuse

Network (PDAN)

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Executive Summary

Background

Domestic violence (DV), also commonly referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), is victimizing individuals across the globe. For the scope of this research, DV is the selected terminology. In this project, it is defined as “abuse and violence that happens in close relationships, like dating, living together, and marriage. It can include name-calling, hitting, stalking, physical or sexual harm, control, and manipulation”. This definition was developed to be accessible and based on the work of many previous scholars in the field (Fonteyne et al., 2024; Furman et al., 2017; and Karlsson et al., 2022). In 2018, it was found that 44% of women aged 15 or older who have been in an intimate relationship, experienced psychological, physical, or sexual abuse in the context of a relationship (Government of Canada, 2024).

The most brutal form of DV is femicide, a term developed to describe the gender-based murders of women and girls (UN Women, 2024). In 2023, a woman was murdered by a partner, or family member, every 10 minutes across the globe (UN Women, 2024). This accounts for a minimum of 51,100 women who were only able to escape the cycle of DV through one final and heinous act of violence (UN Women, 2024). In 2022, a Coroner's Inquiry was conducted in response to a triple-femicide in Renfrew County, Ontario, Canada. The Coroner's Jury issued 86 recommendations, and this project was developed to address recommendation #24:

Complete a yearly annual review of public attitudes through public opinion research, and revise and strengthen public education material based on these reviews, feedback from communities and experts, international best practices, and recommendations from the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC) and other IPV experts (Coroner's Jury, 2022).

This research focused on gathering public opinions about DV from members of Peterborough City and County. This included, but was not limited to, how the community

defines and perceives DV and what educational materials the community wants to see made available. Feedback received from the research will help the Peterborough Domestic Abuse Network (PDAN) revise and strengthen their current education and outreach services.

Methods

Five research questions were proposed by PDAN and were held central in the development and analysis of the survey. This was a public opinion survey that adopted a mixed-methods approach; however, the majority of the data was quantitative. There were 14 demographic questions, and 20 project related questions, one of which was an open-ended question for the participants to share what they wished with the research team. The survey was composed of four sections. The first section gathered demographics, the second examined how common DV is, the third collected perception of DV, and the fourth looked at preventing and addressing DV. Survey data was collected from December 9th, 2024 to January 10th, 2025.

The sample was comprised of 199 people across Peterborough City and County aged 16 or older. Recruitment posters contained a QR code for the survey and they were placed at various libraries, community centers, and municipal offices in Peterborough City and County, and Trent University's Symons Campus. The link to the survey was shared on the Community Counselling Resource Centre's (CCRC) social media accounts. Participation in this survey was voluntary. Participants were required to provide their informed consent and were permitted to opt out of responding to any questions. This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board at Trent University, File 29342.

Key Findings

Demographics

- Two thirds of respondents were between the ages of 30-59 years old.

- 92% of respondents resided in Peterborough year-round
- Just over half (53%) of the participants indicated they live in urban areas, while 37% live in a rural area and can see their neighbours, and 10% live in a rural area and cannot see their neighbours.
- 168 identified as a cis-woman, 19 as a cis-man, 4 as non-binary/gender fluid, 2 as transgender, 1 as two-spirited, 1 selected other, and 4 preferred not to say.
- The majority of participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual (81%), and 15% identify as 2SLGBTQIA+
- 94% of participants self-identified their race/ethnicity as European/Caucasian
- English was the most frequently spoken language. Nine participants indicated speaking English and an additional language which included Dutch, Finnish, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Punjabi, and Russian.

Defining and Perceiving Domestic Violence

- The Coroner's Jury recommended declaring domestic violence an epidemic, which has been done in Peterborough City and County. Three quarters of participants (75%) strongly agreed with this label and one fifth (20%) somewhat agreed.
- Participants believed sexual assaults happen “more often than people think” in relationships and in Peterborough City and County.
- Members of the Peterborough community understood that DV is multifaceted, and they aligned their definition with the one provided in the project.
- Community members recognized that women are most likely to experience domestic violence, but also acknowledged that anyone, regardless of gender, can experience it. Participants believe DV happens most commonly against women, followed by gender-diverse people, and then men.

Community Education and Outreach

- There was a strong consensus on healthy relationship dynamics. However, there was less of a consensus on what is viewed as unhealthy.
- Participants felt best suited to help a close friend or family member experiencing DV.

- Respondents were most in favour of putting information on healthy and unhealthy relationships in secondary schools, community organizations, libraries, and health care facilities. They were least in favour of veterinary clinics.
- Participants want information on healthy and unhealthy relationships available for youth.

Conclusion

The findings of the survey indicate that participants have a clear understanding of the definition and prevalence of DV. Furthermore, it became apparent that the respondents want to see the rates of DV reduced. However, there is an identified lack of clarity on the role individual citizens can take in these situations. The findings of the research provide a strong foundation for PDAN to revise and strengthen their education and outreach materials tailored to the identified needs of the community.

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