The help-seeking behaviors among women with IPV experiences expressed in online health communities

Dr. Vivian Hui, RN, BSN, PhD, Assistant Professor, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Nursing

Malavika Eby, Department of Psychology at Swarthmore College

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Background

01 IPV is Widespread & Harmful
IPV affects one in three women and exacerbates their risk for many physical & mental health issues.

02 IPV is Stigmatized & Severely Underreported
IPV is treated as a private family matter and women refrain from reporting IPV out of pressure to protect their families.

03 Women Prefer Informal Help-seeking
Women consistently prefer to disclose IPV experiences to informal networks like friends and family over police and other formal agencies.

04 Advantages and Disadvantages of OHCs
Advantages: Accessible, anonymous, find solidarity with other survivors
Disadvantages: Risk of misinformation, victim-blaming

(Parvin et al., 2016) (Johnson & Belenko, 2021; Paul, 2016; Muluneh et al., 2021)
Research Goals

To evaluate the usefulness/reliability of OHCs, we need to explore the help-seeking situation in those OHCs.

This is the **first** study with the goal to examine the help-seeking behaviors and types of advice sought by women with DV experiences in an online health community.
Methods

Why is Reddit our data source?

Inclusion/Exclusion

Phases of Analysis

Inclusion Criteria for Posts:
• Aged 18+
• Abused women
• Sought help to resolve DV-related issues
• Written in English

Exclusion Criteria for Posts:
• Under age 18
• Non-abused women
• Good news/gratitude postings
• Propaganda posts
• Automatic replies in comments
• Non-English posts
Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of Reddit posting screening.
Methods

Phases of Data Analysis

Data Annotation

Reliability of the coded dataset
Kappa score: 0.66, Percent agreement: 85%

Descriptive Analysis

Thematic analysis of initial postings
### Annotation Codebook Example

#### Help-seeking behaviors – Sources of Help asked and received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support sought by OP</th>
<th>Based on the first postings by OP, what support were sought explicitly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intangible support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information support sought</td>
<td>Asked any of the following information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Shelters/ DV center/ Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Childbearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Wound assessment/record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) DV report procedure/Documentation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7) Safety planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8) Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9) Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10) Healthcare information (counselling, psychiatrist, doctor etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11) DV survivors’ network/ (Online) support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12) DV knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13) Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14) Miscellaneous (Other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support sought</td>
<td>Asked for emotional support:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which were the most common types of abuse experienced and help requested? What were the most common themes in help-seeking posts?

**Results** (N = 250)

**Common Abuse Types**
1) Physical abuse (N = 148, 47.1%), 2) Sexual abuse (N = 109, 34.7%), 3) Emotional abuse (N = 36, 11.4%), and 4) Financial abuse (N = 21, 6.7%)

**Common Help Requests**
1) General information advice (N=70, 40.6%), 2) DV knowledge (N = 43, 25%), 3) Legal (N = 21, 12.2%), 4) Communication (N = 15, 8.7%)

**Thematic Analysis Results**
Key Themes: (1) Recognition of the problem (n=57, 22.8%), (2) Advice-based help-seeking (n=98, 39.2%), (3) Emotional-based help-seeking (n=69, 27.6%), and (4) A forum for expression (n=50, 20%) (5) Explaining DV experience to others (n=15, 6%)
# Results

## Examples of Key Themes/Sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the problem</td>
<td>N=57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Narratives of personal thoughts (Context) | Posters elaborate the thoughts about abusive experience and showing signs to recognize the danger from IPV. | “I know its mostly all lies and intended to intimidate me, i know he is a bad person and abusive, i know i should leave for me and my kids sake, i know I'll be happier once he is gone.”  
“I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't know how to feel right now because I know what he did was wrong and that it should never have happened.”  
“Can he change? Will he really change? Should I trust him again?” |
| - Self-blame                                | Posters wonder whether they were to blame for what happened to them.         | “I feel like I was to blame.”  
“I feel I’m to blame. I’ve had insecurities/trust issues this whole relationship, and apparently me asking questions is yelling at him, and disrespecting him.” |
| - Clarification/recognizing the situation by others (confusion) | Posters were confused about what had happened to them and seeking for clarification whether the behaviour is abuse, are they in danger, is it risky or not? | “Is it abuse?”  
“Is it still family violence if I let him abuse me before?”  
“Am I putting my kids in danger if I do not report him to police?” |
Discussion
What were our key findings?

- General Advice
- DV Knowledge
- Legal Information
- Safety Planning
- Identifying Abuse
- Emotional Support
- Emotional Validation
- Expression & Communication
Implications

01. Empirical evidence of need for legal and IPV knowledge

02. Difficulty identifying abuse/red flags

03. Emotional needs of women with IPV experiences
Limitations

**Lack of Diverse Backgrounds**

First, this study is unable to capture all the aspects of demographic information such as age, sex, education background, and income. Additionally, most Reddit users are from English-speaking countries.

**Focus on Female Help-seekers**

Our results should only be interpreted under the context of OHCs among women with IPV experience.

**Doesn't Include Full Range of Help-seeking**

The sample postings selected for this study are limited to 250. This could restrict the inclusion of other types of help-seeking behaviors in this population, like some postings related to the aftermath of DV.

Only 1 OHC data source has been used with a limited sample size (N=250).
Conclusion

What can we learn from this study?

Designing Better OHCs

- Anticipate users' needs
- Minimize misinformation
- Early & useful intervention
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URMP students
Julieta Zabala
Emily Goon
Malavika Eby
Molly Lunney