

Link between intimate partner violence and depression

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Not only are women who have experienced violence from their partner (intimate partner violence) at higher risk of becoming depressed, but women who are depressed may also be at increased risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, according to a study by international researchers published in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

Furthermore, there may also be a link between intimate [partner violence](#) and subsequent suicide among women, but little evidence to support a similar finding in men.

The researchers led by Karen Devries from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical [Medicine](#), reached these conclusions by reviewing published studies that followed up individuals over a period of time (longitudinal studies) and examined intimate partner violence, [depression](#), and [suicide](#) attempts.

Over 36 000 people from high- and middle-income countries were included in the review and in a further analysis, the authors found that in women, experience of intimate partner violence nearly doubled the odds of subsequent depression. However, they also found the reverse; that is, women with depression had nearly double the odds of subsequently experiencing intimate partner violence.

For men, the authors found some evidence of a link between intimate partner violence and later depression but no evidence for a link between depressive symptoms and subsequent intimate partner violence.

The authors say: "Our findings suggest that interventions to prevent violence need to be explored for their efficacy in reducing different forms of depression. Similarly, for women already receiving mental health treatments or presenting with symptoms of depression, attention must be paid to experiences of violence and risk of future violence."

They continue: "Further research is needed to explore why having depressive symptoms can lead to incident violence—it may be that young women with [depressive symptoms](#) are predisposed to choose partners who use violence."

The authors add: "It is clear that addressing the burden of untreated mental disorders in a population could have substantial effects on the prevalence of violence."

In an accompanying Perspective, Alexander Tsai from Harvard Medical School in the US (uninvolved in the study) says: "The review reveals major gaps in research on [intimate partner violence](#) and depression, including lack of adjustment for childhood sexual abuse or other trauma."

Tsai continues: "A life course perspective, which is missing from much of the research on determinants of violence in general, would greatly enrich the field by helping intervention programs better address histories of child abuse and/or family violence in identifying targets for secondary prevention."

More information: Devries KM, Mak J, Bacchus L, Child J, Falder G, et al. (2013) Intimate Partner Violence and Incident Depressive Symptoms and Suicide Attempts: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. PLoSMed 10(5):e1001439.[doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001439](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001439)

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