

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346049496>

Resilience and Survivors of Violent Crime

Technical Report · November 2020

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32373.40167/2

CITATIONS

2

READS

282

5 authors, including:



Benjamin Roebuck

Algonquin College

36 PUBLICATIONS 24 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Diana Eisenfeld

Algonquin College

2 PUBLICATIONS 2 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Maryann Roebuck

University of Ottawa

19 PUBLICATIONS 26 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Male Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada [View project](#)



Finding the Optimal Balance between Fidelity and Fit: Local Adaptations of Crime Prevention Programs [View project](#)

Resilience and Survivors of Violent Crime

Prepared by: Benjamin Roebuck
Holly Johnson
Diana Eisenfeld
Maryann Roebuck
Jennifer Barkley

Our team respectfully acknowledges that we live, work, and gather on the traditional and unceded territories of the Algonquin People.

This paper draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Roebuck, B., Johnson, H., Eisenfeld, D., Roebuck, M., & Barkley, J. (2020). *Resilience and Survivors of Violent Crime*. Ottawa, ON: Victimology Research Centre, Algonquin College.

Corresponding author: Benjamin Roebuck, roebuck1@algonquincollege.com

ALGONQUIN
COLLEGE
Victimology
Research Centre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who shared their expertise with our research team. It was a tremendous privilege to listen to people from across the country describe their experiences. We recognize the strength it took to speak and we hope we have done justice with what we heard.

Thank you to our research partners and collaborators:

- Priscilla de Villiers and Peter Sampaio, Victim Justice Network
- Heidi Illingworth, Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime and Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime
- Ruth Campbell, Inbal Solomon and Board Members at Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime
- Sharon Rosenfeldt, Victims of Violence

Thanks to our team of researchers and research assistants:

- Jennifer Barkley and Caitlin Jebakumar-Corbett, Victim Justice Network
- Alicia Clayton, Diana Eisenfeld, Leah Moody, Diana McGlinchey, Emma Worrell, Thushara Vasukuttan, Zein Abboud, Marissa Locke, and Ruchi Swami, Algonquin College
- Jean-Denis David, McGill University
- Brendyn Johnson, University of Ottawa

Finally, thank you to the Algonquin College Office of Applied Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship for your logistical support, specifically:

- Cristina Holguin-Pando (Director)
- Danielle Evong (Research Administration and Ethics Coordinator)

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	5
RESULTS	6
How did violence affect health?	8
Where did people access support?	8
Were victim services helpful?	9
What contact did people have with the justice system?	11
How satisfied were people with the justice system?	12
Experiences with the police	12
Experiences with the court system	14
How did people change following experiences of violence?	15
Post-traumatic growth	16
Victim or survivor?	18
RECOMMENDATIONS	20
APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the Victim Justice Network, researchers at Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa conducted a mixed methods study that sought to answer these questions:

1. How do people recover from violence?
2. What supports and resources are most meaningful and helpful to victims and survivors of violence?

Overview of Respondents:

We received 435 responses to an online survey and conducted 71 follow-up interviews with victims and survivors from every province and territory across Canada. We heard from 335 women (77% of the sample), 95 men (22%), and five people who identified as two spirit, non-binary, or gender queer (1%).

Types of violence reported to the survey, were:

- Intimate partner violence (35%, n = 154)
- Sexual violence (32%, n = 141)
- Homicide or other violent death (22%, n = 96)
- Other types of violence – for example, physical assault (10%, n = 44)

Informal Supports and Victim Services:

Most people in the study drew on informal supports, such as friends and family, following experiences of violent crime. The most common formal supports reported were different types of victim services, which typically focus on immediate crisis intervention, followed by mainstream mental health and medical services. Longer-term mental health supports, such as access to a psychologist or counsellor were highly valued, though some people found the cost to be prohibitive.

Experiences with the Justice System:

The survey contained indicators of satisfaction with the justice system that reflect language in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (2015). Participants were generally dissatisfied with the justice system, with less than half reporting that they were kept informed about their case, that the police or crown attorney had respected their views, or that police had protected their security, identity, and privacy. Just over half felt that the police and crown attorney believed them. Cases involving homicide had the highest likelihood of people being kept informed, while cases involving male survivors of intimate partner violence received the lowest satisfaction scores in all categories.

People who went through the justice system or accessed victim services reported that it was helpful to receive information through a single point of contact – someone who was knowledgeable about victims' rights within the justice system and could explain the process to them. They appreciated proactive communication about developments in their cases and having phone calls and emails returned. Some people who did not receive adequate information missed opportunities to attend court or to provide input about their personal safety. People expressed gratitude for service providers who listened well, and they recommended more training in the justice system and victim services to better understand trauma and limit insensitivity.

Almost all participants reported a degree of personal growth on the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which measures the following domains: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life. Scores were highest in the domains of appreciation for life

and personal strength, and lowest in the domain of spiritual change. In our study, women reported higher levels of post-traumatic growth than did men, with the highest scores reported in cases involving homicide or female survivors of intimate partner violence, and the lowest reported by male survivors of intimate partner violence. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between satisfaction with the justice system and reported levels of post-traumatic growth, suggesting that improvements to justice processes may contribute to higher levels of well-being for those who experience violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Survivors need on-going, proactive access to information to ensure their rights to participation and protection are respected.**
- 2. People who work with victims of crime in the community or the justice system should receive training in trauma and violence-informed care and should understand diversity.**
- 3. Holistic and longer-term approaches to trauma would help to better respond to the way people's needs continue to change after violence.**
- 4. Governments, justice agencies, and services for victims need to conduct evaluation research to assess the extent to which victims of crime in Canada have access to their rights as outlined in provincial and federal legislation.**

INTRODUCTION

Trauma is messy. There's no road map; there's no structure that's going to work perfectly for all people, all the time. Getting through it is tough. It takes a lot of resilience, a lot of strength and people in your corner. A support network is so important. — Female survivor of sexual assault

How do people recover from violence? What supports and resources are most meaningful and important to survivors of violent crime? ¹

In partnership with the Victim Justice Network, researchers at Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa set out to answer these questions. With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), support from the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC), Victims of Violence, and Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), our team set out to answer these questions based on online surveys and personal interviews with survivors of violence across every province and territory.

Methods. Our mixed methods study included 435 responses to an online survey and 71 in-person or telephone follow-up interviews with self-selected participants. We asked people to share what had been helpful or unhelpful following their experience of violence, and what changes they had experienced in their personal lives. We also asked for feedback on their experiences with the criminal justice system, victim services, and the support they received from family and friends. From this we learned about the types of interactions that compound trauma and those that support the process of resilience and lead to post-traumatic growth and feelings of well-being. We also learned about the importance of language and how participants felt about words like victim or survivor.

Participants. Out of the 435 people who participated in the online portion of the study, 335 were women (77%), 95 (22%) were men, and 5 people identified as two spirit, non-binary, or gender queer (1%)². Table 1 summarizes the types of violence experienced. Intimate partner violence (35%), sexual violence (32%) and the violent death of someone close to the survey participant (22%) were most common. Other types of violence included physical assault, attempted murder, harassment, kidnapping, threats of violence, human trafficking (10%).

Table 1 *Type of violence*

Type of Violence	% of cases	# of cases
Intimate partner violence	35	154
Sexual violence	32	141
Violent death*	22	96
Other violence**	10	44
Total		435 ^(3,4)

*Violent death includes homicide, acts defined as terrorism by the state, murder-suicide, and impaired driving causing death. **Other violence includes physical assault, attempted murder, and human trafficking.

¹ We use survivor when referring to individuals and victim when referring to legal proceedings or victims' rights.

² We did not ask for gender identity at the time of the violence. Analyses are therefore by sex rather than gender. The responses of the respondents who identified as other genders were collapsed into two sex delineations.

³ Some questions have lower response rates. The number of participants who answered will be noted throughout.

⁴ Survey data only. In interviews, people were able to discuss multiple forms of victimization.

Resilience

Resilience is a process of adapting positively to adverse circumstances. It can be influenced by individual characteristics but is better understood as a series of interactions between a person and their social environment in ways that lead to healthier outcomes. It is highly subjective and personal, rooted in a person's feelings of well-being. The constructivist model of resilience used in this research explores the resources available in a person's social environment, and how people navigate available resources and negotiate to get what they need from them to feel healthy.⁵

Understanding how people interact with service providers, the justice system, and other supports is central to exploring their process of navigating and negotiating the adversity that violence has introduced to their lives. Learning from what is helpful and unhelpful along the way becomes important to designing responses to violence that can better support resilience.

This short report presents a summary of results pertaining to the health impacts of violence, experiences accessing support, what was helpful or unhelpful following an experience of violence, how the survey participants felt they had changed, and if they identify as a "victim," "survivor," or prefer other language. We explore what resources people tended to access most, how satisfied they were with experiences in the justice system, and we use the post-traumatic growth inventory as an indicator of wellness.

⁵ MacDonald, S-A, & Roebuck, B. (2018). Staying alive while living the life: Adversity, strength, and resilience in the lives of homeless youth. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38, 218-235.

RESULTS

How did violence affect health?

Violence can have serious impacts on a person's health: 61 percent of the sample (n = 265) experienced a lasting mental health condition after the violence, including diagnosed and undiagnosed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD (C-PTSD), depression, anxiety, panic disorder, eating disorders, self-injury, substance use disorders and suicidal ideation.

An additional 15 percent (n=65) experienced a lasting physical health condition, with nine percent (n=39) reporting a physical disability as a result of the violence. Physical disabilities included injured limbs, loss of vision, reduced mobility, and acquired brain injury. Other physical health conditions included auto-immune disorders, weight gain, chronic pain, insomnia, memory loss, infertility, and high blood pressure

Where did people access support?

As Table 2 indicates, most participants in this study sought support from informal sources such as friends (61%) or family (54%), and many interacted with a wide range of more formal supports such as mental health services (44%), healthcare (32%), victim services⁶ (30%), and religious supports (16%). A small percentage (14%) indicated that they did not seek any type of support. For people who identified as Indigenous (n = 39), 18 percent accessed Indigenous supports, although this increased to 33 percent of those who practiced traditional forms of Indigenous spirituality. Indigenous participants also tended to have more interactions than non-Indigenous participants with formal supports such as sexual assault centres and mental health services.

For women who experienced intimate partner violence (n = 108), 34 percent spoke with a domestic violence counselor, 26 percent accessed a domestic violence shelter, and 16 percent accessed a sexual assault centre. Both women (n = 108) and men (n = 43) who experienced intimate partner violence reported physical violence in their relationships at similar rates: 83 percent (n=90) and 84 percent (n=36) respectively. However, women were more likely to access healthcare for their injuries (43%, n = 46 vs 7%, n = 3), suggesting that women's injuries were more severe.

In cases of sexual violence (n = 141), a higher percentage of survivors accessed specialized services for sexual assault (21%) than general victim services (12%)⁷. Survivors of sexual assault were the least likely to disclose the violence to anyone, and they were the least likely to seek support from friends (43%) and family (35%). Sexual assaults in childhood and in adulthood are substantially different in terms of the relationship with the offender and what supports a survivor may choose to access. Unfortunately, the way we collected our data grouped these distinct forms of victimization together since several participants identified sexual violence that occurred as children and as adults. This makes it difficult to differentiate which supports they accessed as children or as adults and at what point they may have interacted with the justice system. We will attempt to further delineate this in future publications and throughout our qualitative data, but it remains a limitation in this report.

Family members of victims of homicide or violent death were the most likely to seek support from friends (83%) and family (82%). Family members of homicide victims were the most likely to access victim services (53%), religious supports (27%), or peer support (23%); only one percent indicated they had not sought any type of support. Most participants indicated they had accessed multiple supports, often blending informal and formal resources.

⁶ Includes community, police, and court-based victim services that are not focused on a single type of violence.

⁷

Table 2 Interaction by type of victimization and sex of participant

Interactions	IPV female (n = 108)	IPV male (n = 43)	Sexual violence female (n = 110)	Sexual violence male (n = 29)	Violent death (n = 95)	Other violence (n = 44)	Full sample (N = 429)
Victim Services ⁸	41	9	14	3	53	27	30
Healthcare	43	7	27	17	37	46	32
Mental Health	47	28	46	34	43	52	44
Sexual Assault Centre	16	5	23	17	0	0	11
Domestic Violence Shelter	26	2	5	0	1	0	8
Domestic Violence Counselor	34	16	7	0	3	2	13
Substance Use Counseling	6	5	3	14	2	7	4
Child Protection	23	19	14	14	2	9	14
Virtual Supports	8	14	4	10	7	7	8
Victim Advocacy Organization	12	5	7	0	38	11	15
Workplace EAP	16	12	6	7	22	5	13
Religious Support	14	12	14	10	28	11	16
Indigenous Support	2	0	4	7	3	0	3
Cultural Support	2	0	1	0	1	0	1
Peer Support	14	12	10	10	29	9	15
Family	58	47	36	28	83	46	54
Friends	68	53	46	31	84	41	61
None	10	26	24	34	1	8	14

Note. N = 427, figures are in percentages

Were victim services helpful?

The online survey and qualitative interviews included open-ended questions for participants to describe things they found particularly helpful or unhelpful, with prompts asking about experiences with service providers and the justice system. Of the participants who interacted with any form of victim services (e.g. sexual assault centres, domestic violence shelters, police-based victim services, community-based victim support) experiences were mixed, with just over half reporting things they found helpful, and about half reporting things they found unhelpful.



People found it helpful to have someone guiding them, providing them with information, accompanying them through the legal process, or providing shelter and protection in the case of intimate partner violence. People expressed gratitude that they were not left alone when they were feeling overwhelmed and lost. Participants referred to how helpful they found it when the person listening to them was respectful, patient, available, and seemed to be well-trained and knowledgeable about the type of violence experienced and available options.

In many cases, victim services were perceived as supportive, compassionate, willing to listen to concerns and to answer questions without pressuring or rushing. In addition, participants stated that they were grateful for receiving immediate support, as well as follow-up, longer-term support, and ongoing information.

⁸ Includes community, police, and court-based victim services that do not focus on a single type of violence.

In participants' own words:

The victim services court worker was most helpful: supportive, understanding and compassionate.
— Sister of female homicide victim

[The] Victim-Witness [court-based program worker] was amazing. They kept me informed and answered all my questions about the legal aspects of the process. I was really grateful for their support.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

The victim services caseworker at the court... she was the liaison between us, my family and all the court proceedings. She was a buffer, explainer, and resolution source. She helped explain what was about to happen, asked our approval, and told us the benefits and drawbacks of each action. She was invaluable in keeping us together during the court proceedings.
— Sister of female homicide victim

She helped me out quite a lot. She knew that I had the strength in me to actually be a voice.
— Female survivor of physical assault by a male stranger

She came out and hung out with us and talked to us. I'm sure she was doing counselling in her own way. It just felt like a nice lady coming to talk to us, and it was really comforting.
— Female survivor of childhood physical and sexual assault

It was great to work with one person consistently rather than having to call and speak to somebody different all the time.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

Victim services was great. They assigned me one specific person; it was great to work with one person consistently rather than having to call and speak to somebody different all the time.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I was very grateful that there was a women's shelter. Having a place to stay while I collected my thoughts and considered what to do next was very helpful.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I went to a domestic violence shelter and was connected with resources to help me get the support I needed to stay out of the abusive relationship and know that I was cared for.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

Those who found victim services unhelpful reported that some workers did not believe them, lacked adequate knowledge about the criminal justice system, did not inform them about the rights and services they could access, or did not follow up. Some felt that staff turnover made it difficult to build trusting relationships. Some women expressed frustration with insensitivity from staff at domestic violence shelters and were also upset that shelters were full when they needed protection and that no alternatives were provided. Some male survivors of intimate partner violence and childhood sexual assault felt that victim services are more tailored to women and said they had difficulty accessing adult services for survivors of sexual or domestic violence, occasionally being treated as perpetrators.

Again, in people's own words:

They [victim services] were probably more harmful because they continued the abuse. Not physically, but emotionally in not believing the story.
— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

I was in the shelter and I couldn't stop crying. At one point she turned and barked out, "Why are you crying?" And to me, I felt like I was sitting in front of my husband. I shrunk within myself. Why do you think I'm crying? I'm crying because I'm terrified, because I've come to a shelter and I don't want to have to come to a shelter. I don't want to be my mother, but I am. That's why I'm crying. I couldn't say those things, because the way she said it to me shut me down.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

My VWAP [Victim Witness Assistance Program] worker pushed me to the back burner. I think she found my case unimportant. Although my situation was very complex domestic violence, the police only charged my ex-partner with criminal harassment because I was far too scared to make a statement containing the details of the many assaults. I was really struggling at the time, and I felt I gained no assistance from the worker. She never returned phone calls and was very vague in writing with regards to what the court process would be and what I needed to do.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I have a huge distrust for victim services because they are all for women and when I begged for help later in life they denied that there were male victims of sexual assault and told me to not bother them.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

The services for rape victims only saw female victims.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

No one cared about a 10-year-old boy being raped and left on a riverbank. The police did not take me to a doctor...nor to any counselling services. The services for rape victims only saw female victims.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

I had a prior experience when I was assumed to be a perpetrator and not as a male victim of sexual assault by a woman. There seemed to be a pre-set agenda. It makes you feel even more terrible when people look at you like a criminal.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

Where did people access support?

Almost two thirds of survey participants had contact with police (62%). A smaller number had also been through criminal court (40%), family court (12%), civil court (5%), or a provincial review board in cases where a perpetrator was found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder (NCRMD; 1%). Some had applied for criminal injuries compensation (16%) or had been through the parole process for a federally sentenced offender (10%). Table 3 lists these interactions.

One third (35%) of the sample had no contact with the police, criminal court, or other judicial process. Cases involving sexual violence were the least likely to be reported to the police or proceed to criminal court.

Table 3 Interactions with the justice system by type of violence and sex of respondent

Justice system service	IPV female (n = 110)	IPV male (n = 44)	Sexual violence female (n = 112)	Sexual violence male (n = 29)	Violent death (n = 94)	Other violence (n = 44)	Total sample (N = 432)
Police	72	52	41	31	86	68	62
Criminal Court	46	36	22	24	63	25	39
Family Court	22	32	8	0	4	2	12
Civil Court	5	5	2	10	5	7	5
Criminal Injuries Compensation	15	0	11	14	30	20	16
Provincial Review Board	0	0	1	0	2	5	1
Parole Board	9	7	6	7	22	5	10
No Interaction	26	45	56	59	11	30	35

Note. N=432, figures in percentages

How satisfied were people with the justice system?

The survey contained indicators of satisfaction with the justice system, many that reflect language in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights (2015), which guarantees certain rights to information, protection, participation, and restitution⁹. Participants were generally dissatisfied with the justice system. As shown in Table 4, regarding the right to information, only 35 percent of those who reported the crime to the police agreed they had been kept informed about their case by the police, and in cases that proceeded to court only 31 percent agreed they were kept informed by the crown attorney. People were more likely to be kept informed in cases of homicide, with just over half agreeing that the police (57%) and crown attorney kept them informed (53%).

Less than half of those who involved the police (42%) felt the police had protected their security, identity, and privacy. Just under half felt the police (46%) or crown attorney (39%) had respected their views. Higher percentages felt the police (57%) or crown (57%) believed them.

Those who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with the justice system, and this is especially true for male survivors of IPV (although percentages are based on low counts and should be interpreted cautiously).

In addition to the data presented in the Table 4, people who identified as visible minorities reported lower satisfaction with the justice system than people who identified as Caucasian, and people who were LGBTQ2S reported lower satisfaction than those who identified as heterosexual.

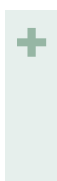
Table 4 Satisfaction with the justice system by type of violence and sex of respondent

Satisfaction Indicators	IPV female (n = 72)	IPV male (n = 22)	Sexual violence female (n = 44)	Sexual violence male (n = 11)	Violent death (n = 75)	Other violence (n = 27)	Full sample (N = 251)
The police kept me informed about my case	26	14	28	27	57	27	35
The crown prosecutor kept me informed about my case	19	5	32	30	53	22	31
The police protected my security, identity, and privacy	31	11	46	50	55	50	42
The police were respectful of my views	31	19	46	36	67	44	46
The crown prosecutor was respectful of my views	28	12	37	50	60	31	39
I felt the police believed me	56	5	53	56	78	58	57
I felt the prosecutor believed me	51	12	54	60	78	69	57
Overall, I was satisfied with the outcome	19	5	20	20	31	19	22
Overall, I was satisfied with the process	15	0	23	10	29	19	19

Note. N = 251, figures in percentages. Since not all participants interacted with the justice system, responses to this question are lower, and it is recommended that categories with less than 20 responses be treated with caution.

Experiences with the police

Police are the entry point to the criminal justice system, and over one-third of participants in this study never reported the violence to the police (38%). When asked open-ended questions about what people found particularly helpful and unhelpful after violence, of the 267 people who interacted with police, 21 percent mentioned something they found helpful and 44 percent mentioned something unhelpful.



Survivors said it was helpful when they felt believed, when police listened to their concerns and answered questions, when police returned phone calls or conducted follow-up calls on the status of an investigation, and when they made useful referrals to support services. They also stated that it was helpful when police did not rush them to provide details of the event, allowed them time to make their own choices, and when police were able to provide support in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner. They also said that it was important for the police to take their safety seriously.

⁹ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-23.7/page-1.html>

The following quotes provide insight, in people's own words:

The police officer assigned to my case worked with the partner assault unit. He was amazing. He was professional and caring. He did his job in a way that showed me respect. I felt like a person again.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

The police were very helpful. They offered me written information and phone numbers of support groups.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

The police officer assigned to my case worked with the partner assault unit. He was amazing. He was professional and caring. He did his job in a way that showed me respect. I felt like a person again.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I can't begin to tell you how incredible it was to have an officer that could spot mental health issues and alcohol abuse. It's incredibly important for an officer to have flexibility in dealing with domestic situations.
— Male survivor of intimate partner violence by a female partner

I was impressed by how positive and supportive everyone in the police department was towards me, and I am certain that this made an enormous difference to how I was able to move on.
— Female survivor of sexual assault

People who shared things they found unhelpful about the police often felt the police lacked proper training for responding to survivors of violence. They reported examples of not being provided with information about their case or referrals to victim services, and not receiving sufficient protection in some cases where personal safety or privacy were a concern. In cases of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, women shared examples of insensitivity or blaming remarks made by police officers. In cases of intimate partner violence, 56 percent of women and only 5 percent of men felt the police officers believed them when they reported the violence. They said:

The patrol officer asked me why I didn't scream or fight harder.

— Female survivor of sexual assault

The patrol officer asked me why I didn't scream or fight harder.
— Female survivor of sexual assault

Police did not seem to have great knowledge of domestic violence. One made an inappropriate remark about me not wearing a bra after I had been beat up.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

[The police] provided my name and address to the attacker as part of the court documents.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

It was an awful experience. I felt like words were put in my mouth. They didn't give me time to answer questions. I felt like I was being pushed to report and didn't really know what was happening. All they wanted were details and [they] didn't care what state I was in.
— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

I didn't hear back about what was going on. When they told me they were not going ahead with anything, I asked what I could do. I was told that there was nothing more they could do.
— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

Police refused to take my name or a report of my sexual assaults. How could this happen? It took me 38 years to summon the strength to disclose my sexual abuse. How could they not even take my name, let alone my information? They made me feel like I was bothering them...that what was done to me didn't matter, or worse, was my fault.
— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

Experiences With The Court System

Of the 170 people who interacted with the criminal court, 26 percent mentioned something they found helpful, and 71 percent mentioned something they found unhelpful.



Participants found it helpful when they felt believed by the crown prosecutor or judge, when they received updates on the court process and were told what to expect at each stage, and when they received responses to their questions or phone calls.

Some people described a seamless integration between police, victim services, the court process, and receiving financial assistance to attend multiple court or parole hearings. Other people felt that the overall process was unhelpful but were able to highlight one or two things they considered helpful, such as reading their victim impact statement or being awarded damages in a civil trial. Ten people shared that they had participated in a restorative justice process.

The following quotes shed light on people's experiences:

The crown prosecutor informed the family about what had happened between court hearings, about what would probably happen at the hearing about to convene, and he explained after the hearing what had happened and possible next steps.

— Sister of homicide victim

Being able to write my victim impact statement helped me work through the process and get out my emotion, anger, and frustration in words.

— Male survivor of childhood physical assault

We are grateful for the financial help we had to attend the court proceedings, parole hearings and Restorative Justice face-to-face meetings. This was a tremendous help. We could not have participated otherwise, and this was very important to us. My husband and I have gone through a Restorative Justice program, meeting with three of the offenders. I never dreamt that I would ever have been in a jail, let alone sit face to face with these men. These meetings were an opportunity for these men to take full responsibility for their actions, show remorse and ask for forgiveness. This changed our lives. I don't have to think of these men they way I did before. I can get on with honouring my son's life and not the circumstances around his death.

— Mother of male homicide victim

My only positive experience that I had within the criminal justice system was that our civil trial was successful. It restored a sense of faith in the judiciary.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

Being able to write my victim impact statement helped me work through the process and get out my emotion, anger, and frustration in words.

— Male survivor of childhood physical assault

As shown in Table 4, levels of satisfaction with the outcomes and the process of the justice system were low. Some participants felt that the prosecutor or judge did not believe them, did not consider their views on critical issues like plea bargaining, or used insensitive and blaming language. Others were frustrated by requests to tone down their emotional reactions, censoring of their victim impact statements, or felt pressure to convince parole boards not to release the people who had harmed them.

Many participants felt the justice system exists for the accused and that survivors are an afterthought or are secondary to the process. This perception caused further feelings of powerlessness or trauma that some described as worse than the original harm caused by the perpetrator – feelings that could last for years. Specifically:

There is a great disparity between what I thought was available to victims of crime and what is actually available. During the sentencing, my victim impact statement was heavily redacted. Those submitting impact statements were censored in comments having to do with the second and unrecognized victim. These redactions were only apparent to the authors when they sat down in front of the court to read their statement. In dealing with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, it has been a long and painful process, often having to repeat information to a different person each visit. The trauma of my

experience has been revisited each time. Part of me wishes I had never begun the application in the first place. In the end, the possibility of any "disaster relief" will come long after it was needed most, and any effort to get it seems to perpetuate the trauma of the disaster.

— Father of female homicide victim

I learned that the Criminal Justice System actually meant justice for the criminal—the victim was a virtual non-entity or an annoyance.

— Female survivor of attempted homicide

I had no input, no indication of the progress, no information until it was settled (plea deal).

— Female survivor of physical assault

If the system is going to use automatic charging, it MUST ensure it does better in protecting those that are being made to testify in court. There needs to be a better system to support people when those accused are found not guilty due to lack of effort from the investigation.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I got kicked out of court a couple times because I was being overly emotional. The judge removed me from the court and said unless I could control my emotions, he would not allow me back into the trial. I had to sit there, a few feet from the guy that murdered my sister and just sort of grin and bear it through the whole trial and try not to show too much emotion.

— Sister of female homicide victim

It has been extremely difficult to feel that I am somehow responsible to keep him in jail each time he applies for parole. This has added stress over the years. Writing a victim impact statement was hard, and we found little support from any organization.

— Daughter of female victim and mother of female victim in a double homicide

When people ask what the worst thing was to ever happen to me, I don't say the sexual abuse or rape. I say it was the trial.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

I was re-traumatized over and over in court. It was clear that I was the one on trial. Thirty-one years later I still remember every question that the defence attorney asked me: "May I suggest to you that due to your parents' recent divorce that you made up these allegations for attention? In fact, didn't you have a crush on the man you are accusing here today?" When people ask what the worst thing was to ever happen to me, I don't say the sexual abuse or rape. I say it was the trial.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

How did people change following experiences of violence?

Violence can have profound impacts—emotional, physical, financial, and social—and many participants in this study described how they changed in significant ways as a result of their experience. Some people described negative and complex changes such as the loss of loved ones, loss of trust in people or in the criminal justice system, loss of faith, mental health crises, feeling suicidal, feeling less effective as parents, or coping with disabilities resulting from the violence. One woman who survived intimate partner violence said, "What hasn't killed me has made me weaker in every respect." Others shared these views:

I have immense guilt for my children for not being the mother I should have been. I feel guilty for not being further healed in my life. I hate holidays but I have to celebrate them for my children. It is completely exhausting...just extra work. No longer enjoyable. I have realized there will never be any peace from it.

— Sister of female victim in a murder-suicide

I never married, and I never had kids so I think it robbed that from me because I would have loved to have that in my life.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

Others shared similar negative changes, but also described personal changes they valued in response to the violence. Consistently, those who suggested that they experienced positive changes clarified that it was not because of the violence itself, but because of the work they had put in to become healthy. Some people developed closer relationships with family or friends, learned how to ask for help, found ways to help others through similar events, or discovered personal strengths. These stories interwove the harms of violence with personally meaningful indicators of resilience:

It's completely changed me as a person. I'm a strong person. A resilient person. But it's an awful way to become like that.

— Female survivor of childhood physical assault

Although I recognize my strengths and the ways I have grown and changed as an outcome of what I experienced, that isn't a substitute for the missed opportunities, or the pain endured.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

I will no longer allow other people's opinions of me to determine my own self worth. I will no longer allow myself to be put into a box. I will no longer be silenced. I will no longer allow another to have power over me. I am a Child of God and I deserve to be treated with respect.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I learned that the only way to create meaning out of the injustices that happened to me was to apply these experiences toward making a difference for others in the future. This has led to a sense of connectedness with others who are suffering with similar situations.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

Once my crisis happened, I lost everything that I knew about me. It's been 6+ years and I still sometimes search for that person. I've learned that this new person who I have become is pretty good too, but still too flaky for old me's liking.

— Husband and father of wife and son killed by impaired driver

While I wish things were different, I also know I wouldn't be me without these experiences.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

While I wish things were different, I also know I wouldn't be me without these experiences.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

I see things more clearly. And though I feel I have lost a piece of my innocence I will never regain; I have enlightenment I wouldn't trade for anything.

— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

I feel very thankful, not only to be alive, but for one of the worst things that could ever happen to a person...not only did it change my life forever, but it made me a much better person.

— Female survivor of attempted murder

Post-Traumatic Growth

Some of the positive changes people experienced were measured using the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), a 21-item scale that assesses ways people may have experienced personal growth in five key areas following a traumatic event (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996):

Factor 1: Relating to others

Factor 2: New possibilities

Factor 3: Personal strength

Factor 4: Spiritual change

Factor 5: Appreciation of life

Participants were asked to read each statement and indicate the degree to which that change occurred in their life as a result of the victimization they experienced, scoring each item from 0 to 5.¹⁰ The maximum total score on the self-assessment is 105 and the minimum is 0. Results are interpreted through analyzing the total scores of participants out of 105, as well as the mean scores for each factor out of 5. Higher scores indicate more positive change, while any score over 0 indicates some positive change occurred. Table 5 lists the PTGI total scores by type of victimization and sex of participants.

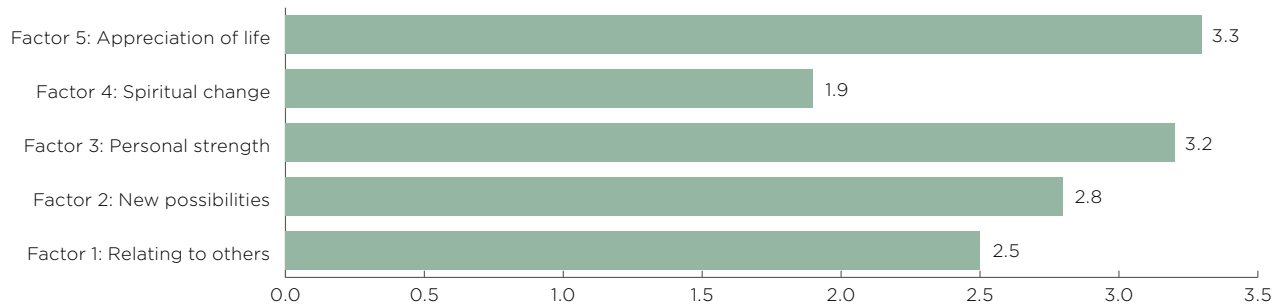
For those who completed the PTGI (N = 403), the mean (or average) total score was 57.1/105. Men reported a lower average score of 49.9 compared to 59.1 for women. The mean was lowest for men who experienced intimate partner violence.

Table 5 PTGI total scores by type of violence and sex of participant

Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)	IPV female (n = 100)	IPV male (n = 40)	Sexual violence female (n = 108)	Sexual violence male (n = 24)	Violent death (n = 90)	Other violence (n = 41)	Full sample (N = 403)
Mean Total Score (Out of 105)	60.9	47.1	55.2	56.1	61.9	52.8	57.1

When we examine the different subcategories provided within the PTGI, there is a similar pattern of scoring across different types of violence. As shown in Figure 1, participants experienced the highest mean levels of growth in the appreciation of life (3.3), followed by personal strength (3.2), then new possibilities (2.8), relating to others (2.5), and finally, spiritual change (1.9):

Figure 1 Mean post-traumatic growth factor scores (N = 403) • (Scored out of 5)



This pattern was common across different forms of victimization. As shown in Table 6, a notable exception to the pattern includes cases of sexual violence, where both females and males scored highest on personal strength (3.2 and 3.4, respectively). Compared to other groups, higher levels of

¹⁰ The 0 to 5 scale is as follows:

0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.

1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.

2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis.

3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis.

4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis.

5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.

spiritual change were reported with cases of homicide (2.3) and parallel the previous finding that this group was the most likely to access spiritual support. Male survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) scored lower than female survivors of IPV in all categories.

Table 6 Mean PTGI Factor Scores by Type of Violence and Sex of Respondent

Factors	IPV female (n = 100)	IPV male (n = 40)	Sexual violence female (n = 108)	Sexual violence male (n = 24)	Violent death (n = 90)	Other violence (n = 41)	Full sample (N = 403)
Factor 1 - Relating to Others	2.7	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.4	2.5
Factor 2 - New Possibilities	3.1	2.6	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.5	2.8
Factor 3 - Personal Strength	3.3	2.4	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.2
Factor 4 - Spiritual Change	1.9	1.1	1.8	1.9	2.3	1.4	1.9
Factor 5 - Appreciation of Life	3.4	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.7	3.4	3.3

Note. Scored out of 5.

Based on preliminary analysis of the PTGI responses from participants who accessed the justice system, we found a small but statistically significant positive correlation between post-traumatic growth and satisfaction with the justice system ($r = 0.16; p < 0.05$)¹¹. Those who were more satisfied with the criminal justice system reported marginally higher scores of post-traumatic growth. The higher scores were linked to people feeling that they were kept informed throughout the process and that they were believed. Additional analysis is needed to further explore these relationships.

The PTGI asks exclusively about ways respondents may have grown following their traumatic experience but does not provide an opportunity to indicate how they have experienced harm. To address this limitation, we included an open-ended question after the PTGI, asking people to describe both positive and negative changes they experienced. While many of those complex changes were described in the previous discussion, a few participants shared their reactions to the questions in the PTGI:

I hope it is understood that in many of these matters the changes I experienced were strongly negative.
— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

Nothing in my life changed for the better. All of that listed above is for people who recovered. I haven't recovered.
— Female survivor of intimate partner violence

All the ones I didn't answer should have been worded in the negative range. Have you people never suffered?
— Male survivor of intimate partner violence

Victim or Survivor?

When describing their experiences with service providers, the justice system, and other supports, our participants said that language was important. Since the words “victim” and “survivor” are frequently used when people experience violence, we asked a question to better understand the impact of those words. We received extensive responses through our survey and interviews, and it was clear that our participants had spent time reflecting on this language. For many, these words were woven into how they talked about the aftermath of violence, their experiences seeking help, and how they now think about their lives.

Among participants in this study, 38 percent identified as survivors and 16 percent preferred the term victim. Additionally, 28 percent actively resisted either term and 18 percent offered alternatives such as co-victim, warrior, thriver, victor, “a mom”, or “just me.”

Women who experienced sexual violence were the least likely to use the word victim (7%) and most likely to use the word “survivor” (48%). In contrast, male survivors of sexual assault were the most likely to use the word “victim” (40%) and survivor was a close second (36%).

¹¹ A detailed statistical analysis of the satisfaction and PTGI scores is forthcoming.

Table 7 Choice of language by type of violence and sex of participant

Language	IPV female (n = 101)	IPV male (n = 39)	Sexual violence female (n = 109)	Sexual violence male (n = 25)	Violent death (n = 90)	Other violence (n = 40)	Full sample (N = 404)
Victim	13	18	7	40	23	13	16
Survivor	40	33	48	36	30	30	38
I try not to use these labels	27	33	26	16	28	38	28
Other	19	15	18	8	19	19	18

Note. Figures are in percentages.

Some participants strongly identified with words like victim or survivor, while others said these terms oversimplify their experiences. Some reported fluidity between identifying as a victim or a survivor, others described a trajectory from victim to survivor, and others rejected both terms, highlighted by the following quotes:

The offender took my sister, but he didn't get me or my spirit. I refuse to let him take anything else from me. I am a survivor.

— Sister of homicide victim

The offender took my sister, but he didn't get me or my spirit. I refuse to let him take anything else from me. I am a survivor.

— Sister of homicide victim

I am a breast cancer survivor, because I fought a battle and won. I am a victim when my mother and daughter were murdered as I had no control.

— Daughter and mother of double homicide victims

In my opinion, none of these words accurately describes me after losing a daughter to murder, but when I tried to find a word that more accurately describes me, I couldn't find one. According to the dictionary, a victim is "a person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action" and a survivor is "someone who manages to continue a successful life despite very bad experiences." That makes the murdered victim and her loved ones victims. The murdered victim's loved ones could also be co-victims. I am also a survivor of homicide, but I wouldn't have called myself that initially and some of us might not 'survive the murder of a loved one very well', so survivor doesn't seem like quite the right word.

— Mother of homicide victim

Although I was certainly a 'victim' of abuse, I don't want to put myself in that box. The way that word feels to me is akin to if I were asked to self-identify as prey... Nobody wants to be prey, even though we almost all fall victim to predators of various kinds at some time in our lives. 'Survivor' sounds almost too final; the word makes me realize that I'm still very much a 'one day at a time' surviving person.

— Male survivor of childhood sexual assault

I alternate between use of "victim" and "survivor". When I speak to the violence itself, I like to be clear that I was a victim. Something traumatic and painful was done to me. Some things were taken away and there is no form of restitution that could alter that or bring them back. The way I view the world is forever altered. When I speak about how I feel today, I am a survivor - someone who was forever changed (and not for the better in many ways), but who has a lot of strength and compassion to offer, and continues to fight, heal, and live.

— Female survivor of childhood sexual assault

RECOMMENDATIONS

The people who participated in this study had diverse experiences of violence and many had interactions with victim services and the justice system. They reported things they found helpful and unhelpful and how responses to violence had affected their well-being. Their experiences lead to the following recommendations.

1. Survivors need on-going, proactive access to information to ensure their rights to participation and protection are respected.

The Canadian Victim Bill of Rights¹² (CVBR) guarantees the rights to information upon request, protection, participation, and the right to seek restitution. People reported that receiving updates on the status of an investigation or court process was helpful, as well as being assigned a single point of contact within victim services who understood the justice system and could provide advice about rights and services. People wanted written information, so they were not required to remember it in times of crisis. They wanted emails and phone calls returned, and to receive follow-up information. The justice system is complex, and survivors wanted to be kept informed proactively - not required to request information. In some cases, survivors who were not proactively informed about the progress of their cases missed important opportunities to participate or to provide information that could have better ensured their protection.

2. People who work with victims of crime in the community or the justice system should receive training in trauma and violence-informed care and should understand diversity.

People accessed a wide range of services and reported mixed experiences with service providers and the justice system. They wanted more training for service providers and justice officials to better understand crisis reactions, mental health, and substance use disorders related to trauma. Women wanted better responses to sexual violence from the justice system, and male survivors wanted more services responsive to their needs.

3. Holistic and longer-term approaches to trauma would better respond to the way people's needs continue to change after violence.

Exploring both harm and growth - negative and positive changes - provides a more nuanced picture of victimization that helps with understanding resilience and recovery. People described the complex ways they had changed following violence, often experiencing a dynamic mix of post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic growth. This may be better described as post-traumatic change. Many survivors continued to seek help for years after the violence, whether tied to later involvement with the justice system such as a parole hearing, or as they passed through later life experiences, such as starting a new intimate relationship or becoming a parent. We recommend that services for victims be more responsive to the longer-term needs of survivors as they continue to process their experiences and come to terms with the ways their lives have changed.

4. Governments, justice agencies, and services for victims need to conduct evaluation research to assess the extent to which victims of crime in Canada have access to their rights as outlined in provincial and federal legislation.

In this research, questions about satisfaction with the justice system were designed to mirror aspects of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights to investigate the extent to which people felt their rights were respected. People reported low to moderate levels of agreement that they had been kept informed about their cases, that they were protected, or that their views were respected. We further found a small but statistically significant positive relationship between people's experiences in the justice system and self-reported levels of post-traumatic growth. Given how the justice system and services for victims can play an important role in the lives of some people who experience violence, we recommend ongoing evaluation to audit their impact and to learn more about what is working, what is not, and specific barriers that are reoccurring. We also recommend that standardized indicators of victims rights be developed, measured regularly in Canada, and embedded within Statistics Canada's General Social Survey on Victimization and other relevant justice surveys to evaluate whether victims' entitlements in law are upheld within the justice system.

¹² https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/2015_13.pdf

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods study was funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and was a partnership between Principal Investigator, Dr. Benjamin Roebuck, a Professor in the Victimology program at Algonquin College and the Victim Justice Network (Priscilla de Villiers and Peter Sampaio). Further collaboration was offered through the University of Ottawa (Dr. Holly Johnson and Maryann Roebuck), the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (Heidi Illingworth), Victims of Violence (Sharon Rosenfeldt), and Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime (Chair, Ruth Campbell and the Board Members).

Participants. In total, 339 women, 95 men, and 5 people identifying as two spirit, non-binary, or gender queer participated in this study, with 435 completing an online survey available in English and French, and 71 choosing to participate in qualitative interviews in person or over the telephone. Recruitment of study participants took place from January to May 2017, through the websites, social media, and listserves of victim assistance and advocacy organizations across Canada. The study was also profiled in a national newspaper and on national radio during the period of recruitment.

There were three criteria for participating in the study: to have experienced violence; to be 18 years of age or older (although they could speak about violence that happened earlier in their lives); and, to not be actively involved in a criminal trial at the time of the study. Ethics approval was granted from the Research Ethics Boards at Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa. Responses were collected anonymously to protect the identity of the participants.

Data analysis. We used SPSS to analyze quantitative data descriptively, as well as with independent t-tests, Pearson's correlations, and multiple regressions, where relevant. We recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim and uploaded the transcripts into QDA Miner. We used an inductive, grounded theory approach to thematically analyze the qualitative data and also included coding relevant to a constructivist model of resilience.

Limitations. Participants were not randomly selected; therefore, those who chose to participate are not necessarily representative of all people who experience violence. The study was conducted in English and French and consequently does not adequately capture the views of newcomers to Canada. The online format of the questionnaire means that the study was biased in favour those with internet access and a relatively high level of literacy. Our methodology did not allow us to clearly separate childhood and adult experiences of sexual violence - an important distinction that would add value to the findings.

More detailed methodology is available upon request and will be published in academic journals as analyses continue. Table 8 provides a description of our study sample.

Table 8 *Sample Characteristics*

Survivors	Number	%
Age (2017)		
>19	6	1
20-29	55	13
30-39	69	16
40-49	103	24
50-59	106	24
60+	83	19
No response	13	3
Total	435	100
Sexual Orientation		
Gay or lesbian	18	4
Heterosexual/Straight	357	82
Bisexual	40	9
Asexual	2	0.5
Pansexual	2	0.5
Two-Spirit	1	0.5
Queer	1	0.5
Other/No answer	14	3
Total	435	100
Ethnic/Cultural Origins*		
Indigenous	39	9
White/Caucasian	392	92
African, Caribbean, Black	16	4
Latin American	5	1
Asian - West	4	1
Asian - East & South	11	3
Prefer not to answer	3	1
Born in Canada		
Yes	375	86
No	52	12
Prefer not to answer / No answer	8	2
Total	435	100

Religion		
Christian	181	42
Jewish	3	0.5
Muslim	3	0.5
Sikh	1	0.5
Traditional (Indigenous) Spirituality	20	5
No religious/spiritual affiliation	157	36
Other/No answer	70	16
Total	435	100.5
Province/Territory*		
Newfoundland and Labrador	2	1
Prince Edward Island	3	1
Nova Scotia	15	3
New Brunswick	6	1
Quebec	21	5
Ontario	239	55
Manitoba	7	2
Saskatchewan	11	3
Alberta	26	6
British Columbia	38	9
Yukon	1	1
Northwest Territories	4	1
Nunavut	1	1
Multiple locations	25	6
Outside of Canada	29	7
Prefer not to answer / No answer	8	2
Highest Level of Education at Time of Violence		
No formal schooling	16	4
Primary School	64	15
Some secondary school	42	10
Secondary school diploma	47	11
Some college / trade school	33	8
College diploma / trade certificate	55	13
Some university	46	11
University degree	122	28
I don't remember	2	1
Prefer not to answer	8	2
Total	435	103

Gender of Person Inflicting Violence		
Man	242	56
Woman	60	14
Other	7	2
Multiple offenders	50	11
Don't know / No answer	76	17
Total	435	100