

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Head injury screening and intimate partner violence: A brief report

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Summary/Conclusions

The aim of this study was to identify prevalence rates of mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBIs) in a sample of intimate partner violence (IPV) victims. Using a TBI screening tool (HELPS) and Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2), researchers used publicly accessible police reports to identify women involved in heterosexual relationships who were victims of IPV. This study found that 80% of participants screened positive for a lifetime incident of head injury and 56% currently met criteria for mTBI. Women who reported a lifetime incident of head injury (80%) also reported current, frequent post-concussive symptoms.

Limitations of Information

The report outlines a preliminary study of the prevalence of mild mTBIs from IPV. The study used a small sample size of literate, English-speaking women involved in heterosexual relationships in an urban area in a western state. The psychometric properties of the HELPS is a preliminary screening tool and has not been validated. Findings include results using the screening tools mentioned and provide an estimate in absence of neuropsychological testing.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Implementation factors impact outcomes

Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) occur when a person receives a head injury and experiences, in most cases, some loss of consciousness. Post-concussive symptoms include a number of symptoms including pain, attention and memory problems, difficulty in distracting environments, cognitive disruptions, depression, and suicidality. These symptoms create disruptions that may interfere in a person's ability to follow directions or seek follow-up care.

This study sought to identify the prevalence rate of women who have been involved in recent incidents of IPV and have a mTBI. Using publicly accessible police reports, women who were victims of a recent incident of IPV were contacted. Of those who agreed to be a part of the study, they were given the HELPS screener and CTS-2. The study identified women who had a mTBI in their lifetime or as a result of a recent IPV event.

Of the 225 women who were a part of the study, 80% reported hitting their head sometime during their lives, compared to 9% of women in the general population. Fifty-six percent of women in the study screened positive for a mTBI. The most common reason shared for head injury was interpersonal violence, including child abuse, interpersonal aggression, and assault. Other causes of mTBI reported included motor vehicle accidents. Eighty percent of women who reported lifetime incidence of brain injury reported experiencing

current and frequent post-concussive symptoms.

Practical Applications

- ✓ As a responsiveness issue, explore TBI prevalence by asking the probationer about their history of hits to the head, head injuries, loss of consciousness, confirmed medical documentation of TBI, history of sports or military related injuries, falls, and motor vehicle accidents.
- ✓ Be aware of possible post-concussive symptoms such as distractibility, pain, attention and memory problems, depression, and suicidality.
- ✓ Ask probationers about historical and current exposure to interpersonal violence.
- ✓ Assist probationers with TBIs by minimizing distractions, repeating expectations, allowing for short breaks, writing down pertinent information, and sending reminders for tasks and appointments.
- ✓ If there is suspicion of a possible brain injury, refer the probationer for neuropsychological screens to confirm impairment.
- ✓ If there is confirmed impairment and the probationer wants additional case management services, refer them to the Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado at biacolorado.org.
- ✓ Seek out additional information and professional resources for TBIs on JudicialNet.