

Intimate Partner Violence in the Northwest Territories

Land Acknowledgement

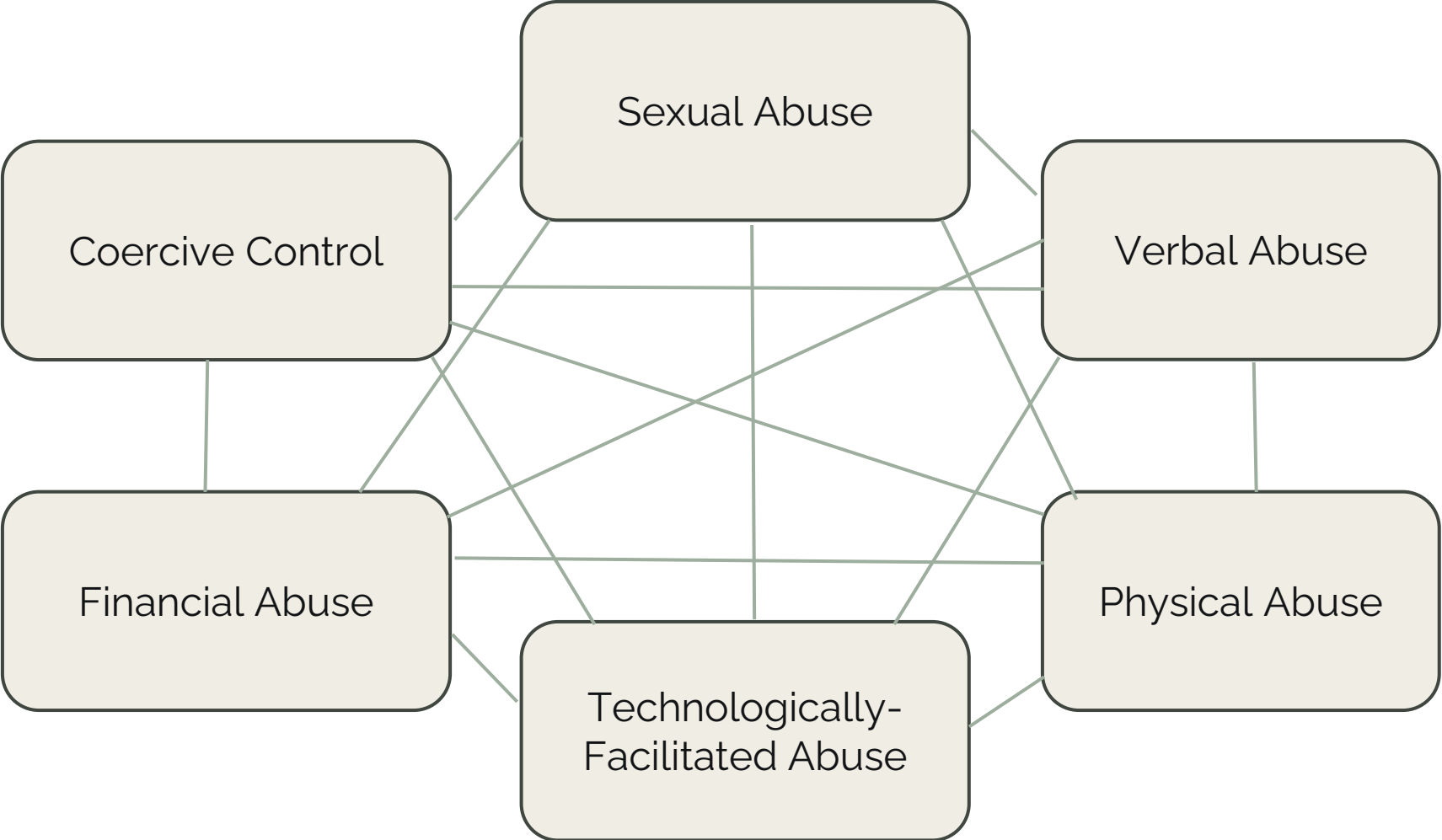
We want to acknowledge that we are here today on Chief Drygeese Territory. The YWCA NWT does operate programming across the Northwest Territories and we acknowledge that our work operates on the traditional territories of the Dene, Inuvialuit, Metis, and Cree peoples of the Northwest Territories. We are deeply grateful to learn, work, and contribute to these lands, and we hope to improve access to services for survivors of violence across the Northwest Territories.

Introduction

YWCA NWT PROGRAMS

- Alison McAteer House
- Emergency Protection Orders
- NWT Shelter Network
- Safe Homes in Fort Simpson & Fort Good Hope
- Independent Legal Advice & Representation (ILAR) Program
- Programs in Transitional Housing, Child & Youth Care, Employment Readiness, and Indigenous Wellness

What is Intimate Partner Violence?



Statistics

CANADA

- The Canadian average for police-reported IPV was **356 per 100,000** population
- The Canadian average for **female victims** of IPV was **552.62 per 100,000** population

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

- The NWT average for police-reported IPV was **3877 per 100,000 population**
- The NWT average for **female victims** of IPV was **6367.85 per 100,000** population
- In 2024, 1182 police-reported incidents of IPV had a female victim

The Northwest Territories continues to be second highest in police-reported IPV in Canada. IPV is a heavily gendered issue.

Statistics

- Indigenous women in Canada are at **higher risk** for IPV, for reasons including intergenerational trauma, geographical isolation, increased availability of weapons, poverty, and systemic discrimination (Heidinger, 2021)
- The types of violence that women and men experience differ. Women are more likely to experience **the most severe forms** of such violence, including multiple victimizations and incidents with physical injuries (Sinha, 2013)
- GBV is significantly more prominent in **rural, remote, and northern** locations of Canada. Costly transportation and limited services are profound roadblocks for survivors seeking safety, while a lack of privacy, normalization of firearms, emphasis on traditional values and other such elements increase the risk of violence (Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, 2021)

Maintaining Control in an IPV Relationship

- Patterns of control can occur gradually and over long periods of time. Little by little, abusers take control over the survivor's life to make them dependent on the abuser.
- The presence of coercive control is a **significant risk factor** for future serious or fatal violence, particularly if the survivor is trying to leave the relationship.

Source: Regroupement des Maisons Pour Femmes Victimes de Violence Conjugale, n.d.



Source: <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/understanding-power-control-wheel/>

Trends Staff See in the NWT

- **Financial Abuse:** An increase in financial abuse, particularly in Elders
- **Substance Use:** An increase in clients reporting substance use by the abusive partner
- **Surveillance & Monitoring:** An increase in clients reporting surveillance by an intimate partner- abusive partners demanding passwords for social media and email accounts, phones being watched by an abusive partner, etc.
- **Complex IPV Matters:** Increased complexity in client matters: mental health, immigration, complicated investigations, abusers in positions of power, etc.
- **Long-Term Relationships:** An increase in clients wanting support with long-standing intimate partner relationships
- **Immigration:** An increase in IPV within the immigrant community and lot of stigma about IPV in this group
- **Emergency Protection Orders:** EPO applications have been getting denied, and it seems like there is still a focus only on physical abuse during EPO hearings
- **Substance Use:** Lack of aftercare & housing in the NWT means that clients will return from treatment, find themselves in unsafe situations, and call for shelter services

Policy Considerations

- **Protection Against Family Violence Act:** Legislation that guides EPOs
- **Housing:** Waitlists for public housing is months long
- **Income Support thresholds:** Cannot make even slightly over the threshold or have savings (which can be life-saving for survivors trying to flee IPV)
- **Childcare:** Lack of childcare options in the NWT means that survivors cannot work, limiting their availability to be financially independent
- **System Navigation:** Many systems are working in silos, meaning survivors must approach multiple services to receive all the support they need. This can be very exhausting and confusing to navigate, especially when in a crisis state. There are implications for IPV survivors across the spectrum – health, justice, housing, income, education, employment, etc.

Known Legal Gaps & Barriers

- **Legal Aid:** Income testing causes significant barriers for IPV survivors who may need to go to court for matters such as child custody. Many clients cannot afford to hire a private lawyer but do not qualify for Legal Aid, or experience long waitlists to be assigned a lawyer.
- **Court Delays:** There is often a lot of time between charging an abuser and going to court. During this delay, survivors may feel pressure from their partner or family members to return to the relationship and not proceed with court (Moffitt & Fikowski, 2017).
- **Court Intimidation:** IPV survivors might not show up to court due to court proceedings being open to the public. If IPV survivors do not attend court, RCMP may be sent to find them, which can further re-victimize the person (Moffitt & Fikowski, 2017)
- **Denied EPOs:** JPs seem to place an emphasis on physical abuse, meaning that many EPO applications get denied
- **Remoteness of the NWT:** Limited support in small communities, limited transportation to find safety, geographically vast areas, being dependent on weather to leave a community, lack of privacy in small communities, & limited resources all contribute to barriers a survivor may face when experiencing IPV (Moffitt & Fikowski, 2017)

Strangulation, Brain Injuries, and IPV

- **92%** of IPV survivors experience signs and symptoms consistent with a traumatic brain injury (TBI). IPV survivors may have difficulty recounting facts, remembering words, and may be overwhelmed by questions, all of which are expected by them during a court process
- A woman is **7.5 times more likely** to be killed by her partner if he has strangled her in the past. It is a significant predictor of future homicide.
- No visible marks are found in 50% of strangulation cases

How Can We Support Survivors?

- **Coordinated Response:** Working together instead of in silos will result in better service delivery, quicker response times, and survivors feeling better supported by systems.
- **Committing to Ongoing Education:** Listening to those with lived experience is essential to providing better services. Professionals that commit to ongoing education send a message that this work is important and valued in the Northwest Territories.
- **Stable, Multi-Year Funding:** If funding is stable for multiple years, agencies will have more resources and time to dedicate to supporting survivors. Across disciplines, advocating for continued funding shows solidarity.
- **Trauma-Informed Court Processes:** Court processes can be revictimizing and overwhelming for many. Survivors would deeply benefit from investigations, trials, hearings, and other court processes that are trauma-informed and culturally-safe.

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