

Topic

Mental Health Anti-Violence Hub for Empowerment, Advocacy, Resilience, and Trauma Support (MHAV-HEARTS)

Key question

How can mental health services be designed to meet the needs of people affected by intimate partner violence through coordinated, culturally safe, and trauma-informed approaches across community and hospital mental healthcare settings?

Project aims

Gender-based violence (GBV), including intimate partner violence (IPV), is a pervasive public health issue that affects diverse populations and intersects with mental health, systemic inequities, and service access challenges. Communities, including those across Simcoe/Muskoka and the Greater Toronto Area have seen rising rates of GBV, with survivors and those who have engaged in IPV often reporting unmet mental health needs and fragmented pathways to care. There is a critical gap in culturally safe, trauma-informed services that address both survivors and individuals who have used violence. In collaboration with key community partners, Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care is launching MHAV-HEARTS to address this gap.

Key focus areas

- **ODARA 101:** Updating and evaluating the ODARA 101, the online training for the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA)—a structured tool used across justice, health, and social service sectors to assess the risk of IPV recidivism. <https://odara.waypointcentre.ca/>
- **LEAP:** Developing and implementing the Lived Experience Advocacy and Partnership (LEAP) program—an online training that equips individuals with lived experience of IPV to become co-researchers, community leaders, and advocates who contribute their expertise to research and partnership initiatives.
- **Clinician Training:** Designing, implementing, and evaluating a training program to help mental health professionals better recognize and respond to GBV and IPV. The program builds on resources from the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) and the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy (OSP) program.

Helpful terms

- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** the violence that people experience in their lives because of their gender, or gender expression, gender identity or how other people perceive their gender.
- **Intimate partner violence (IPV):** psychological, physical, or sexual abuse by a current or former intimate partner or spouse.

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