

The Impacts of Social Work Interventions with Victims of Gender-Based Violence (VGBVs) on Social Work Practitioners: A Scoping Review Protocol¹

Authors

Marie Beauchesne¹, Véronique Gauthier², Charlotte Huard³

1. Professor, Social Work, Université du Québec à Rimouski

2. Professor, Social Work, Université du Québec à Rimouski

3. Doctoral Candidate, Université du Québec à Rimouski

Abstract

Objective: This scoping review aims to provide an overview of current knowledge about how delivering social work interventions to victims of gender-based violence (VGBVs) impacts social work practitioners.

Introduction: Social work interventions with VGBVs are linked to adverse consequences for practitioners, including burnout and social difficulties (Leung et al., 2023), as well as some positive effects such as personal growth (Lundy & Crawford, 2025). While several recent studies document these effects, no literature review has yet been conducted on this topic.

Inclusion: This scoping review will include studies involving any category of social work practitioners providing services to VGBVs and working in any organized professional practice setting (e.g., domestic violence shelters, call centers, etc.). Studies reporting any impacts on social work practitioners related to gender-based violence (GBV) interventions will be considered. These impacts may be negative (e.g., anxiety) or positive (e.g., resilience).

Methodology: This review will be conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020). A literature search will be performed in seven (7) databases, including a grey literature database. The review will include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, without publication date restrictions. Studies published in French or English, or that can be translated using an application, will be included. Two reviewers will independently screen all studies, and any disagreements that cannot be resolved through consensus will be submitted to a third reviewer. Data will be extracted using an extraction form in Covidence (see Appendix 2) and subsequently analyzed.

Keywords: Occupational health; Social work; Sexual violence; Domestic violence, Intimate partner violence

¹ The Impacts of Social Work Interventions with Victims of Gender-Based Violence (VGBVs) on Social Work Practitioners: A Scoping Review Protocol © 2026 by Marie Beauchesne; Véronique Gauthier; Charlotte Huard is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

Interventions with VGBVs carry risks to the health and well-being of social work practitioners (Boulebsol, 2019; Clemans, 2004; Goldblatt et al., 2009; Lundy & Crawford, 2025) and have been linked to adverse consequences such as vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, psychological distress, relational, sexual and social difficulties, and burnout. These risks are increased for practitioners with a history of victimization (Leung et al., 2023). At the same time, these interventions are also associated with positive effects such as personal growth (Goldblatt, 2009; Lundy & Crawford, 2025; Painchaud-Bouchard, 2023), compassion satisfaction (Kulkarni et al., 2013) (Wachter et al., 2020), and vicarious resilience (Boulebsol, 2019). Despite a growing number of studies examining the positive and adverse outcomes of providing social interventions to VGBVs, to our knowledge, no literature review exists on this topic. A thorough understanding of the impacts of this professional practice on the practitioners who carry it out could inform recommendations for their training and professional preparation, as well as support the development of preventive health strategies.

A preliminary search identified some ongoing or completed evidence syntheses related to this project. A qualitative systematic review of healthcare professionals' experiences working with survivors of sexual violence has been underway since 2022 (McFadden et al., 2022). However, this systematic review includes only medical and nursing staff, excluding mental health professionals, and focuses specifically on sexual violence. A narrative review examining the health and well-being of staff working with victims of intimate partner violence was published in 2024 (Lundy & Crawford, 2024), but this review included only English-language studies focusing on intimate partner violence exclusively. No completed or ongoing evidence syntheses specifically addressing the topic of this review were identified.

This review aims to summarize current knowledge about how providing social work services to VGBVs impacts social work practitioners. Given the breadth of potential impacts, the exploratory nature of a scoping review (Descatha et al., 2025) makes it the most appropriate method for achieving this objective. This review will map the impacts reported to date, identify trends in the literature, and highlight gaps in academic knowledge, thereby informing future research.

Research Question

What impacts can social work practice with victims of gender-based violence (VGBVs) have on social work practitioners?

Inclusion criteria

Population

This review will consider studies focusing on any social work practitioners, regardless of professional title or affiliation, as these may vary across geographical locations. For example: social workers, community workers, social service assistants, educational support workers, social support workers, and educators.

Concept

The review will consider studies examining any impacts of social work practice with VGBVs on social work practitioners. These impacts may be psychological (stress, anxiety, vicarious trauma, burnout, flashbacks, vicarious resilience, etc.), physical (pain, musculoskeletal disorders, injuries, fatigue, etc.), existential (self-questioning, increased awareness, social commitment), relational (relationship ending, disaffiliation, isolation), sexual (sexual difficulties), or of any other nature. The impacts may be positive (e.g., resilience) or negative (e.g., stress).

Context

The review will consider studies on any social work practice carried out with VGBVs within an organized professional setting. Examples include shelters for women and children who are victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual assault support centers, sexual violence call centers, community support groups for victims of violence, and hospitals or care centers where social work practitioners support VGBVs. The individuals involved in the intervention may be identified or self-identify as "victims" or "survivors" of gender-based violence.

Type of sources

This scoping review will consider quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, regardless of methodological approach. Studies published in French or English, or that can be translated using a translation platform (e.g., Google Translate), will be included. Evidence syntheses that meet the inclusion criteria will also be considered, and therefore the analysis strategy will make sure not to account for the same studies more than once, if said evidence syntheses include studies that were also considered individually. Monographs and articles for which the full text is not available will be excluded. Consistent with the selected methodological guidelines, this review will consider theses and dissertations that meet the inclusion criteria, as well as relevant grey literature (e.g., conference proceedings, best practice guides, or preventive practices developed by groups or organizations working on gender-based violence).

Methods

This review will be conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020).

Search strategy

The literature search strategy will aim to identify both published and unpublished studies (e.g., theses and dissertations). A preliminary search in the Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest) and Érudit databases identified several relevant studies. Free text terms extracted from titles and abstracts, as well as article keywords, served as a basis for developing a comprehensive search strategy for each selected database (see Appendix 1). The databases to be searched are Web of Science, Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest), Érudit, PsycInfo (PsycNet), CINAHL (EBSCO), and Academic Search Complete (EBSCO). Grey literature will be identified using Dissertations & Theses Global (ProQuest) database and targeted Google searches. Following screening, the reference lists of selected articles will also be reviewed to identify additional eligible studies.

Selection of evidence

The identified records will be imported into Covidence, and duplicates will be removed. A trial screening of 10% of the titles and abstracts will be conducted, following which two reviewers (M. B. and C. H.) will independently evaluate all titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria. The full texts of potentially eligible studies will then be imported into Covidence and assessed for eligibility. Publications that do not meet the criteria following full-text review will be excluded, with the reasons for their exclusion documented. Any disagreement between the reviewers will be resolved by consensus or through the involvement of a third reviewer (V.G.). The study screening process will be reported in a PRISMA diagram (Tricco et al., 2018).

Extraction strategy

Data will be extracted from the included studies using an extraction tool (see Appendix 2). Extracted data will include information about the study's target population, the observed or documented impacts, the contexts of social work practice, and the study's results or recommendations relevant to the objectives of this scoping review.

Funding

This project has not received any funding.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Boulebsol, C. (2019). *Comment maintenir un bien-être au travail quand on est intervenante féministe?: les pratiques des travailleuses dans les centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel (CALACS)* [Mémoire de maîtrise]. Université du Québec à Montréal. <https://archipel.uqam.ca/12882/>. Archipel.
- Clemans, S. E. (2004). Life Changing: The Experience of Rape-Crisis Work. *Affilia*, 19(2), 146-159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109903262758>
- Descatha, A., Morin, E., Pitet, S., Fadel, M., Mayet, A., Huard-Dutertre, L., Lebranchu, T., Vlasak, K. T., Tah-Monunde, L. N., & Eddahiri, K. (2025). Scoping Reviews (revues de portée) et Umbrella Review (revue de revue) : principe, méthodologie et pratique en santé au travail. *Archives des Maladies Professionnelles et de l'Environnement*, 86(5), 102946. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.admp.2025.102946>
- Goldblatt, H. (2009). Caring for abused women: impact on nurses' professional and personal life experiences. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 65(8), 1645-1654.
- Goldblatt, H., Buchbinder, E., Eisikovits, Z., & Arizon-Mesinger, I. (2009). Between the Professional and the Private: The Meaning of Working With Intimate Partner Violence in Social Workers' Private Lives. *Violence Against Women*, 15(3), 362-384. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077801208330436>
- Kulkarni, S., Bell, H., Hartman, J. L., & Herman-Smith, R. L. (2013). Exploring individual and organizational factors contributing to compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout in domestic violence service providers. *Journal of the society for social work and research*, 4(2), 114-130.
- Leung, T., Schmidt, F., & Mushquash, C. (2023). A personal history of trauma and experience of secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and burnout in mental health workers: A systematic literature review. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, 15(S2), S213.
- Lundy, T., & Crawford, J. (2024). Health and wellness outcomes of intimate partner violence support workers: A narrative review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(4), 2942-2956.
- Lundy, T., & Crawford, J. (2025). "A Fire in My Belly": The Health of Community Workers Who Support Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Violence Against Women*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012251319317>
- McFadden, S., Groarke, J., & Lavelle, M. (2022). Exploring the experiences of healthcare professionals who work with survivors of sexual assault: a qualitative systematic review protocol. *PROSPERO* 2024. <https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/view/CRD42022367131>
- Painchaud-Bouchard, P.-A. (2023). *Exploration de l'expérience subjective d'intervenantes travaillant auprès de femmes victimes d'agressions sexuelles au Québec* [Mémoire doctoral]. Université de Sherbrooke. <https://usherbrooke.scholaris.ca/items/4f598e6b-1166-4339-9793-545b7372262d>. Savoirs UdeS.
- Peters, M. D. J., Marnie, C., Tricco, A. C., Pollock, D., Munn, Z., Alexander, L., McInerney, P., Godfrey, C. M., & Khalil, H. (2020). Updated methodological guidance for the conduct of scoping reviews. *JBI Evidence Synthesis*, 18(10). https://journals.lww.com/jbisrir/fulltext/2020/10000/updated_methodological_guidance_for_the_conduct_of.4.aspx
- Wachter, K., Schrag, R. V., & Wood, L. (2020). Coping Behaviors Mediate Associations between Occupational Factors and Compassion Satisfaction among the Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault Workforce. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35(2), 143-154. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00072-0>

Appendix

Appendix 1: Search strategy

The search strategy involves a combined search of databases, conducted on the same date. As an example, here is the detailed strategy for the Academic Search Complete (EBSCO) database.

Database: Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)

Search terms:

Concept 1 (population) Social work practitioners working with victims of gender-based violence *Free text terms for concept 1 will be searched in the "Title" field only to increase search precision.	Controlled: DE "Women social workers" OR DE "Social work with women" OR DE "Social work with adult child sexual abuse victims" OR DE "Social workers" Free: "social worker*" OR "community worker*" OR therapist* OR "health professional*" OR "community health worker*" OR "health personnel" OR psychotherapist* OR "shelter worker*" OR "shelter staff" OR "IPV specialist*" OR "intimate partner violence specialist*" OR "IPV work*" OR "intimate partner violence work*" OR "SA work*" OR "sexual assault work*" OR "DV specialist*" OR "domestic violence work*" OR "medical personnel"
Concept 2 (concept) Impacts	Controlled: DE "Employee health promotion" OR DE "Employee well-being" OR DE "Occupational diseases" OR DE "Work environment" OR DE "Job stress" OR DE "Psychological resilience" OR DE "Mental fatigue" OR DE "Psychological burnout" OR DE "Emotional Experience" OR DE "Experiential learning" OR DE "Life change events" OR DE "Psychological adaptation" OR DE "Work-life balance" OR DE "Life " OR DE "Theory of self-knowledge" OR DE "Critical self-reflection" OR DE "Self-perception" OR DE "Anxiety" OR DE "Anxiety Disorders" OR DE "Health self-care" OR DE "Mental health" OR DE "Psychological stress " OR DE "Emotional trauma" OR DE "Secondary traumatic stress" OR DE "Psychological resilience" OR DE "Tragedy (Trauma)" OR DE "Quality of life" OR DE "Quality of work life" OR DE "Relationship quality" OR DE "Healing" OR DE "Introspection" OR DE "Critical thinking" OR DE "Struggle" OR DE "Self-realization" OR DE "Role Satisfaction" OR DE "Job satisfaction" Free: "vicarious trauma" OR resilience OR "compassion fatigue" OR "personal experience*" OR "lived experience*" OR "past experience*" OR "life change*" OR "psychological adaptation*" OR "psychological adjustment*" OR "secondary traumatic stress" OR "work-life balance" OR "life meaning" OR "previous experience*" OR "personal life" OR "personal lives" OR "emotional process*" OR "mental process*" OR healing OR introspection OR reflection OR burnout OR "Job stress" OR anxiety OR wellness OR "self-knowledge" OR "self-reflection" OR "self-perception" OR "employee* wellbeing" OR "employee* well-being" OR "employee* health" OR "employee mental health" OR "occupational stress*" OR "occupational disease*" OR "work-related stress*" OR growth OR struggle* OR realization* OR "positive outcome*" OR "positive occupational outcome*" OR reward* OR fulfill* OR "positive impact*" OR "negative impact*" OR "compassion satisfaction" OR "self-actualization" OR coping OR "emotional trauma" OR "mental fatigue" OR "quality of life" OR "relationship quality" OR "Role Satisfaction"

Concept 3 (context)	Controlled: DE "Rape" OR DE "Adult child sexual abuse victims" OR DE "Gender-based violence" OR DE "Rape culture" OR DE "Domestic violence" OR DE "Intimate partner violence" OR DE "Campus violence" OR DE "Violence against LGBTQ+ people" OR DE "Child sexual abuse" OR DE "Sex crimes" OR DE "Clergy's sexual behavior" OR DE "Violence against transgender people" OR DE "Violence against gay people" OR DE "Violence against bisexual people" OR DE "Bisexual partner abuse" OR DE "Marital violence" OR DE "Sexual aggression" OR DE "Sexual harassment in universities & colleges" OR DE "Sexual misconduct by teachers" OR DE "Sexual misconduct by clergy" OR DE "Sexual harassment " OR DE "Online sexual predators" OR DE "Child sexual abuse by teachers" OR DE "Violence against lesbians" OR DE "Violence against gay men " OR DE "Prevention of marital violence" OR DE "Prevention of campus violence" OR DE "sexually abused children " OR DE "Child sexual abuse by clergy" OR DE "Violence against women" OR DE "Victims of domestic violence" OR DE "Women's shelters" OR DE "Abused women's housing" OR DE "Survivors of abuse" OR DE "Victims of abuse" OR DE "Services for abused wives" OR DE "Abused wives" OR DE "Abuse of women" OR DE "Wife abuse" OR DE "Crimes against women"
Social work context of practice with victims of gender-based violence	Free: "gender-based violence" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "survivor* of sexual" OR "victim* of sexual" OR "women's shelter" OR "domestic violence" OR "shelters for women" OR "survivor* of abuse" OR "victim* of abuse" OR "rape" OR "sexual assault" OR "sexual violence" OR "sexual aggression" OR "sexual abuse"

Date of search:

Number of results:

Appendix 2: Data extraction tool

Category	Detail	Notes
Year		
Authors		
Country		
Type of article		
Objective of study		
Type of study (method)		
Population (Social work practitioners)	Social Workers, Community workers, educators, etc.	
Concept (impacts)	Type of impacts studied or documented	
Context (Social work context of practice)	Community center, shelter, etc.	
Results/ recommendations		