RESPECT Framework

A guide for engaging survivors of intimate partner violence in research

Waypoint
CENTRE *for* MENTAL HEALTH CARE
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PATHS
Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan

About the Framework

The RESPECT Framework aims to enhance the involvement of survivors in research on intimate partner violence. It seeks to move beyond the traditional role of survivors of intimate partner violence as mere participants and instead collaborate with them throughout the research process.

Our RESPECT study focused on understanding current survivor involvement in research, identifying barriers and facilitators to partnerships, reviewing existing collaborative models, and co-creating a new framework to assist both organizational researchers and survivors in building respectful, productive, and sustainable partnerships.

To develop the RESPECT Framework, researchers conducted a rapid review, held a roundtable with survivors, service providers, and researchers and gathered feedback through focus groups. This collaborative effort resulted in a codeveloped framework that provides a practical approach to conducting ethical, equitable, and intersectional participatory research with IPV survivors.

The resulting RESPECT Framework consists of five foundational elements, each accompanied by specific recommendations for successful implementation: (1) Centering Safety, Well-Being, and Emotional Support; (2) Sharing Power Between Organization-Affiliated and Lived Experience Researchers; (3) Respect, Trust, and Relationship Building; (4) Ensuring Equity and Accessibility; and (5) Respecting and Celebrating Diverse Identities.

How to Cite

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1 Centering safety, well-being, and emotional support

It's important that lived-experience researchers feel physically, emotionally, culturally, and psychologically safe at the outset and during all phases of the research process. Safety includes supporting lived-experience researcher autonomy and boundaries and creating a non-judgmental space for all researchers. A culture rooted in supporting one another requires organization-affiliated researchers to acknowledge and consider the following:

1. The impact of institutional traumas and the historically exploitative and extractive nature of research
2. That intimate partner violence transcends all sociocultural identities and boundaries, and that individuals from different cultural backgrounds may conceptualize abuse differently
3. Participating as a lived-experience researcher may come with an emotional toll.

Recommendation 1 - Plan for safety ahead of time

Establish draft protocols and guidelines for safety during research participation before lived-experience researchers become involved. Lived-experience researchers should have the opportunity to review, revise, and approve safety protocols and guidelines.

Recommendation 2 - Be transparent about what involvement entails

Inform interested co-researchers of possible negative consequences, such as administrative and legal requirements and potential emotional or physical harms of being a lived-experienced researcher and provide them with all pertinent information needed for fully informed consent. All researchers must be clear about limits to confidentiality (i.e., mandatory reporting requirements) that apply across researcher and participant roles.

Recommendation 3 - Let lived-experience researchers determine their involvement

Support lived-experience researchers in determining how they want to be engaged and contribute to the project (i.e., provide options but prioritize flexibility and autonomy). Highlight various opportunities for participation and emphasize that lived-experience researchers can participate as little or as much as they want.

Recommendation 4 - Support voluntary participation

Emphasize that participation in a project as a lived-experience researcher is voluntary, and establish a procedure for lived-experience researchers to terminate their involvement at any time, for any reason. Options to withdraw consent at any time (e.g., redacting or revising disclosed information prior to dissemination) must be clearly described.

Recommendation 5 - Provide meeting agendas in advance

Provide all researchers with an outline or agenda before meetings to ensure they are aware of potentially distressing topics. Consider including space on meeting agendas for open discussion related to the study topic and for researchers to introduce items for discussion.

Recommendation 6 - Build a network of available and affordable supports

Provide options for available support services and resources if lived-experience researchers experience distress during their involvement in the research project. This may be a direct referral or a list of local and national resources they can access independently, including mental health, allied health, financial services, cultural support, and/or social services.

Recommendation 7 - Offer resources for support

Include a budget for emotional (e.g., counselling) and practical (e.g., transportation, interpretation services, childcare) support in funding applications. Consider including a retainer for service providers with expertise in supporting individuals with experience of intimate partner violence, and a protocol for making a direct referral.

2 Sharing power between organization-affiliated and lived-experience researchers

This foundation captures recommendations that emphasize lived-experience researchers as valued knowledge holders, leaders, decision-makers, and equal contributors to the research process and its direction. In this capacity, all researchers share equal ownership of the project and its outputs, reflecting a collaborative and respectful research relationship.

At the same time, this foundation captures sentiments that emphasize that organization-affiliated researchers are expected to take a step back when appropriate, creating space for lived-experience researchers to guide, influence, and shape the work meaningfully.

Recommendation 8 - Let ideas come from survivors/victims

Leveraging community connections, provide spaces for research ideas to originate from intimate partner violence survivors/victims (whether they are engaged as researchers beyond this point or not). Allow research goals to be determined by the people the research is aiming to benefit and serve.

Recommendation 9 - Put community first

Prioritize research that serves the needs of the community, including survivors. Conduct research with the well-being of the community in mind, being mindful not to be exploitative and "take from" the community. Acknowledge that the burden of research differs between organization-affiliated and lived-experience researchers in terms of time, money, safety, and other resources.

Recommendation 10 - Treat all researchers as equal team members

Involve lived-experience researchers as you would any other research team member, not only for their lived expertise but also for their knowledge and opinions more broadly.

Recommendation 11 - Share project ownership

Involve lived-experience researchers in research proposals and funding applications. Prioritize equitable ownership of projects and outputs with researchers and community organizations, ensuring that the views of lived-experience researchers are integrated into project planning and execution. Create a clear agreement on data ownership and access that outlines how all researchers can access and use data collected during the project.

Recommendation 12 - Share credit

Offer the option to be recognized as a co-author on all publications and knowledge products to lived-experience researchers who are involved in the research process.

Recommendation 13 - Share findings widely

Co-create a communications plan to share research findings with the community. Partner with lived experience and community-based researchers when creating knowledge products, sharing research with academic and community audiences, and translating research into practice to ensure findings have a broad reach and are accessible.

Recommendation 14 - Support communities to use research findings their way

Leverage academic researchers' knowledge translation skills, outlets, and resources to support communities in using or disseminating research findings. As much as possible, academic researchers should support the autonomy of community-based and lived-experience researchers' choices of how to specifically use and disseminate research findings.

3 Respect, trust and relationship building

Relationship-building grounded in empathy and humility can foster genuine connections and trust. Consistency, transparency, and openness are all key components in cultivating trust with lived-experience researchers. In authentic relationships, community members can feel comfortable approaching academic researchers with their ideas and trust that academic researchers will listen and learn when they raise them.

Building trust may require extensive time and effort, given that people with lived experience of intimate partner violence have experienced violations of trust in their relationship and in the broader community, including institutional betrayal from the academic research sector. It is especially important to ensure that relationship-building efforts are not transactional, conditional, or have hidden motives; build relationships for the value of the relationships themselves.

Authentic relationships may help lived-experience researchers and community members to feel comfortable approaching organization-affiliated researchers with ideas for research and suggestions or concerns during the research process. Further, demonstrating respect for lived-experience researchers is imperative to ensure they feel welcome and valued.

Recommendation 15 - Give time to authentic relationship building

Establish partnerships before conceptualizing the projects so that all researchers can be engaged in identifying research priorities and developing the project and research methods. Dedicate time to building, maintaining, and sustaining relationships throughout project development, learning from each other in how to do this in both formal and informal ways.

Recommendation 16 - Make clear rules together

Co-create ground rules that establish a culture of respect, trust, and non-judgement between organization-affiliated researchers and lived-experience researchers. Be consistent in applying rules and follow through on promises. Additionally, regularly review, as a team, how these values are being met and provide ways to communicate openly and address when they are not.

Recommendation 17 - Make project details transparent

Share information clearly and honestly about the project goals and objectives. Be transparent about funding, who will have access to the data, and when and how the broader community may be informed of the results.

Recommendation 18 - Be clear that benefits may not be quick

Organization-affiliated researchers should emphasize that lived-experience researchers may not see any direct (i.e., quick, tangible, or personal) benefits to participating in the research partnership, other than compensation, if applicable.

Recommendation 19 - Ask people how they want to be identified

Ask lived-experience researchers how they wish to identify, not only relating to their lived experience with intimate partner violence (e.g., victim, survivor, survivor/victim), but also relating to their role in the project (e.g., lived-experience researcher, co-researcher, lived-experience co-researcher, survivor co-researcher, consultant, lived-experience expert). Be mindful that people may want to be anonymous or only provide their initials.

Recommendation 20 - Be flexible as the project changes

Stay flexible to accommodate changes in the research protocol as the project progresses. Be open to additional researchers joining and consider how that might affect project partners, goals, and methods.

Recommendation 21 - Balance organizational and relational goals

Ensure that organizational priorities – such as the pressures on academic researchers to have high-profile grants and publications – are balanced with the commitment to sustained, long-term partnerships with lived-experience researchers and their communities, with a shared goal of ending intimate partner violence. Avoid prioritizing institutional goals that may undermine lived-experience researchers' trust in the research process and jeopardize meaningful engagement in the research partnership.

Recommendation 22 - Recognize relational boundaries

Recognize and communicate boundaries between academic and lived-experience researchers (e.g., academic researchers cannot act as counsellors or clinicians for lived-experience researchers).

4 Ensuring equity and accountability

Equity and accessibility must be considered and integrated throughout the research process to ensure that groups that have been historically excluded and/or marginalized groups are meaningfully included, respected, and prioritized:

1. Recognize that research dynamics and academic processes may not be widely understood.
2. Integrate equity by breaking information down so that everyone can understand and can participate fully.
3. Acknowledge barriers to participation and structure projects to minimize the barriers and support everyone's participation.

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Recommendation 23 - Minimize barriers to participation

Strive to increase the accessibility of being a lived-experience researcher. Consider and provide solutions to barriers related to geographic location, economic status, equity-denied identities, parental status, language and culture, disabilities and differences, etc. (e.g., provide interpretation services and funding for childcare).

Recommendation 24 - Compensate lived-experience researchers fairly

Build compensation for lived-experience researchers into funding proposals and budgets, and collaborate with them to ensure compensation is fair. Ask lived-experience researchers how they would like to be compensated, providing several options, including monetary and non-monetary.

Recommendation 25 - Use accessible language

Use accessible, plain language and avoid jargon in all communications with the research team, including emails, meetings, and public-facing materials. Additionally, avoid acronyms (e.g., IPV [intimate partner violence], CBPR [Community-Based Participatory Research]) to facilitate understanding.

Recommendation 26 - Provide education about the research methods and processes

Since lived-experience researchers may or may not have been involved in research before, provide information and training about the research process to promote confidence in their understanding and role as researchers.

Recommendation 27 - Make materials for sharing findings clear and relevant

Encourage feedback from lived-experience researchers on the accessibility of materials throughout the project. Also, explicitly ask lived-experience researchers to review all knowledge translation materials for accessibility and relevance.

Recommendation 28 - Share findings in open-access formats

Ensure research findings and knowledge products are easily accessible to service users and service providers through open-access options, when possible. If an open-access publication is not possible due to publication timelines or budget constraints, consider uploading the findings to an online repository or organizational website. Knowledge translation can also be achieved through online presentations and meetings to overcome geographic barriers while encouraging more involvement and community engagement.

Recommendation 29 - Create online outputs with accessibility in mind

When creating a project website or using other public outreach platforms, attend to accessibility features such as colour contrasts, content layout, page movement, text captions and keyboard navigation. Consider options for readers to toggle lengthier text on or off (i.e., display headings initially with a drop-down explanation that can be toggled on or off).

5 Respecting and celebrating diverse identities

Some lived-experience researchers may feel more comfortable engaging with organization-based researchers who share aspects of their cultural or social identity. The identities that matter most can vary by individual: while some may prioritize their identity as a survivor or victim, others may find their experiences as a disabled person, a racialized person, or someone from a gender or sexual minority to be equally or more central.

Adopting an intersectional approach and remaining reflexive about how organization-affiliated researchers' own identities shape their research practices and influence team dynamics can promote transparency around identities that are meaningful to the research partnership and support inclusivity, mutual understanding, and strong collaborative relationships.

Recommendation 30 - Strive for diverse teams

When recruiting students and support staff, implement steps to avoid unconscious bias, such as removing identifiers from applicants' resumes, assembling a diverse hiring panel, and using structured interviews. Share information about organization-affiliated team members' identities with lived-experience researchers to be transparent about which identities are represented.

Recommendation 31 - Offer choices for team contacts

Where feasible, offer lived-experience researchers the option to select the person who will be their primary organization-affiliated researcher contact within the research team, especially as research relationships and project plans are being developed. This may help lived-experience researchers feel at ease and comfortable sharing their views.

Recommendation 32 - Practice cultural humility and sensitivity

Acknowledge and address how cultural norms and the intergenerational impacts of colonization shape understandings of violence. and b Build research team capacity to engage with these complexities through reflexivity, cultural humility, and trauma-informed practice.

Recommendation 33 - Support diverse community needs

When planning, conducting, and disseminating research, reflect on diversity within the community (e.g., Indigenous women, LGBTQ2S+ survivors) and how intersecting identities or overlooked groups are being considered.

Recommendation 34 - Provide culturally-focused training to research teams

Invite the research team to learn and grow together by providing education and training on cultural competency and other diversity issues as relevant to the project. Budget for professional development in funding applications.

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Learn more about The RESPECT Study at **https://www.celia-ipv-project.ca/respect**

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