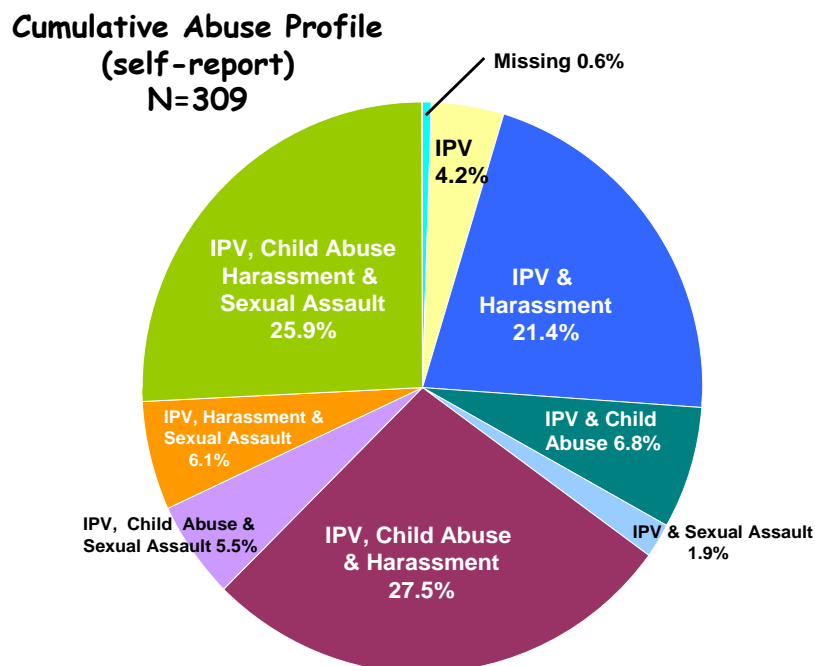


## Lifetime Abuse/Trauma

**Abuse experienced over a lifetime (child abuse, sexual assault, intimate partner violence) influences the physical and mental health of survivors.**

Our research revealed that most survivors have experienced abuse by more than one trusted person over their lifetime. Types of abuse include child abuse and neglect, witnessing woman abuse, bullying, dating violence, workplace abuse, adult sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and harassment after leaving. Abuse can be assaultive (physical and sexual), psychological (coercion, control, humiliation, intimidation) or economic. For many, child abuse continues into adulthood and harassment and abuse continue after leaving an abusive partner.

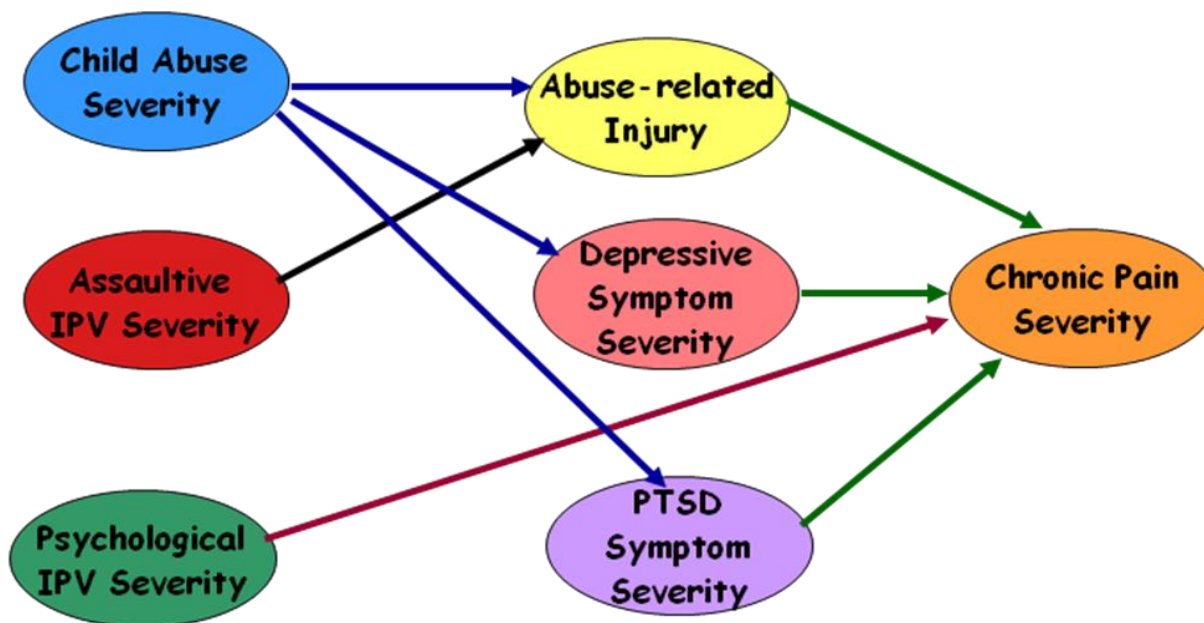
The 309 women in the Women's Health Effects study (WHES) had complex histories of abuse, many reporting multiple traumas over their lifetime. When asked, 66% (n=193) reported having been abused as a child. However according to a set of standardized questions that measure specific abuse experiences, 81% had been abused as children; 78% emotionally, 62% sexually, and 46% physically. For 43% of those who reported child abuse, the abuse extended past age 16. This abuse was perpetrated by various trusted people in women's lives, including but not limited to: fathers (28%), mothers (24%), brothers (7%), other family members (22%), friends of family (7%), and people in position of authority (6%). 40% (n=115) of the women had been sexually assaulted as an adult by someone other than their recent abusive partner. Of these, 25% were assaulted by a boyfriend or other partner, 11% by a stranger, 11% by acquaintance/date/coworker, and 5% by family members. Of the 309 women, 59% had more than one abusive partner in their lifetime. The average duration of woman abuse from the most recent abusive partner was 8.5 years. Even after leaving, 83% experienced continued harassment from ex-partner, and 40% reported ongoing abuse at the time of interview. Nearly half (45.5%) of the 309 women had been taken to the emergency department for abuse-related injuries at some point in their lives, and 78% (n=240) of them had sustained abuse-related injuries at least once. 58.4% had experienced workplace bullying at some point in their lives.



It has been well established that trauma from child abuse, sexual assault, and violence from an intimate partner individually have negative effects on women’s physical and mental health. More recently, clinicians and researchers have begun to recognize that the health consequences of abuse may be better understood by examining patterns of abuse (types, duration, severity & timing) over a lifetime. In the WHES, we have examined how patterns of abuse are linked to chronic pain, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. For example, in comparison to women in the WHES with low disability pain, abused women with high disability chronic pain were more likely to have experienced each of child abuse, adult sexual assault, more severe spousal abuse, and lifetime abuse-related injuries.

We also explored how severity of child abuse, severity of assaultive (physical and sexual) intimate partner violence (IPV), and psychological IPV together with lifetime-abuse related injury, depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms affected chronic pain severity.

### Influences of Child Abuse and IPV on Chronic Pain



We found that only past psychological IPV severity had a direct effect on current chronic pain severity. Child abuse severity had direct effects on current depressive symptom severity and PTSD symptom severity in the women. Child abuse severity influenced current chronic pain severity indirectly through current PTSD and depressive symptom severity, and through lifetime abuse-related injury. Interestingly past assaultive IPV severity only affected current chronic pain severity through lifetime abuse-related injuries.

Our findings underscore the continuing effects of child abuse on adult health even in the presence of more recent adult trauma. The identification of a child abuse history provides an opportunity to affirm women’s past experience and explore the significance of past abuse in the context of current health challenges and her social environment. *These findings raise the question of whether services for survivors in NB adequately address the effects of trauma/abuse experienced across the lifespan.*