

An online healthy relationship tool and safety decision aid for women experiencing domestic violence (I-DECIDE)

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Abstract

Promising research has been conducted into health care interventions for women experiencing domestic violence (DV). To date, however, these interventions have predominantly focused on screening and referral to formal services. While this is important, many women may not identify as a ‘victim’ of DV, and may be reluctant to access such services. There may also be barriers to identification and response within health care settings, including: fear of disclosure, time constraints, or concerns about confidentiality. Delivering interventions online or via a smartphone, on the other hand, has the potential to overcome these barriers. It also may assist women in remote locations or women with disabilities, who are unable to access face-to-face services for practical reasons.

The I-DECIDE website is an interactive, online healthy relationship tool and safety decision aid for women experiencing domestic violence[1]. I-DECIDE aims to reduce depressive symptoms and increase self-efficacy, perceived support and awareness in order to help women move toward greater safety and wellbeing over time.

Development of the I-DECIDE website was informed by focus groups conducted with women who had experienced DV. These discussions emphasized the importance of safety, anonymity, and supportive messaging in websites or apps addressing DV. The website also built on prior work conducted by research teams in the USA, Canada and New Zealand, where similar ‘safety decision aids’ are being developed. However, I-DECIDE includes additional interactive components around motivational interviewing, non-directive problem solving, and an ‘action plan’ that is tailored to a woman’s relationship choices. I-DECIDE is also theoretically informed, and represents an example of how research into women’s pathways to change can guide the development of interventions that are more likely to be taken up by end-users. A randomised controlled trial [2] is now being conducted to test the effectiveness of the I-DECIDE website over a 12 month period when compared with a website representing “usual care”. Over 400 women are currently enrolled in the trial, which is ongoing until mid-2016.

Feedback from women has been very positive, with women stating that they felt empowered, validated, listened to, and supported by the website. It is anticipated that, once testing is complete, I-DECIDE could become a valuable resource for the DV sector, functioning as an adjunct to existing services and a way of linking in women who would otherwise not make contact.

Key Words

1. Technology
2. Service delivery
3. Innovation, quality

References

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2. Hegarty, K., et al., *Protocol for a randomised controlled trial of a web-based healthy relationship tool and safety decision aid for women experiencing domestic violence (I-DECIDE)*. BMC Public Health, 2015. **15**(736).

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the potential for technology such as websites or smartphone apps to respond to women experiencing DV.
2. Add to the knowledge base around whether technology can provide effective support to women
3. Highlight the importance of theory in developing interventions