

## The Enigma of Domestic and Sexual Violence: Introduction to Special Edition

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This special edition of *Currents* focuses on issues of domestic and sexual violence. The journal articles are all original research projects first presented at the one-day RESOLVE Alberta conference held in Calgary, Alberta in November of 2007. On that occasion, the RESOLVE Alberta conference was offered in partnership with Calgary's Domestic Violence Committee, which hosted a "*Best Practices Forum: Sharing Experiences, Approaches, & Conversations*" on November 5<sup>th</sup>, with the RESOLVE Alberta Research Day offered on November 6<sup>th</sup>. A number of the programs showcased in the Best Practices Forum had parallel research presentations on the RESOLVE Alberta Research Day, an indication of the partnerships that have developed between the community and academics.

RESOLVE Alberta is one office of a tri-provincial research institute on domestic violence across the three Canadian prairie provinces. The RESOLVE acronym stands for "Research and Education Solutions to Violence and Abuse". The RESOLVE administrative centre is at the University of Manitoba, led by Director, Dr. E. Jane Ursel. Every year since 1999, one of the three RESOLVE offices has offered a conference showcasing not only RESOLVE's prairie based research but also that conducted by community agencies and other academics.

This introduction to the special edition presents information on the serious issue of domestic and sexual violence in Canada as important background knowledge to the journal articles. The RESOLVE Research network and some of its major contributions are also described, followed by brief synopses of the articles accepted for this special edition and bios of their authors to entice you to read further.

### Domestic and Sexual Violence in Canada

Domestic violence has many faces. Not even conceptualized as a social problem half a century ago, it typically extends throughout a relationship and involves significant physical and psychological abusive acts, including sexual abuse and degradation (Statistics Canada, 2005; Tutty, 2006). The major victims are woman (Johnson, 2006); hence the term "woman abuse" is used by several authors in the journal. Such abuse

and the fear it creates are almost inconceivable to the majority of Canadians whose intimate partner relationships are not violent.

While the general public seems to perceive domestic violence as marital conflict “gone wrong,” intimate partner abuse is different from the disagreements that all couples experience. Although some initial abusive acts start as a couple’s quarrel, the core issue is control or jealousy, the intentional and instrumental use of power to control the woman’s actions (Jiwani, 2000; Kimmel, 2002). Evan Stark’s term “coercive control” (2007) is even more fitting.

Canada is somewhat unique in the extent to which the government, through Statistics Canada, has acknowledged and studied the problem by including questions on the context of intimate partner violence in addition to self-reported victimization in its General Social Surveys. What does this research tell us about the nature, extent and consequences of the abuse of Canadian women? The 2004 General Social Survey on Victimization (Statistics Canada, 2005) estimated that 7% of Canadian women are victimized by an intimate partner. Of those that experienced violence, 27% were beaten 25% choked. 44% were injured, 13% sought medical help. Perhaps the most informative factor is that 34% of abused women fear for their lives in reaction to the violence (Statistics Canada, 2005).

While providing an important portrait of the nature of intimate partner violence, this study’s methodology and results have been critiqued as taking a too-narrow definition of violence as criminal acts, and as ignoring the societal inequities that affect women’s lives as compared to men’s (Jiwani, 2000; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2003). Further, it excludes some important facets of women’s experience such as sexual harassment and severe psychological abuse.

Beyond statistics, though, what does domestic and sexual violence look like? We are typically aware that the physical abuse of women by their partners often results in serious injuries and, for some, lifelong disabilities. However, while the focus of domestic violence is often on the physical, psychological abuse is always a factor when women are physically assaulted.

Psychological abuse entails making degrading comments and sexual slurs that target the most private and personal aspects of a woman’s life. Partners often use threats or negative comments to isolate and or alienate women from friends and family, acts that keep women away from their social supports. Some authors suggest that an intimate partner’s controlling and degrading emotionally abusive comments and strategies can have as strong an effect on a woman’s self-esteem as physical violence (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Threats to murder the

woman, and sometimes her children, or for the man to commit suicide also constitute psychological abuse. These elevate the risk of harm to a new level and must be taken seriously, especially if the partner possesses a weapon such as a firearm (Campbell, 1995; Tutty, 1999).

Pregnancy can be a time of particular risk for women. Estimates suggest that one of five pregnant women suffer abuse by their partners (Gazmararian, et al., 1996). While some women identify their first pregnancy as the beginning of the violence (Burch & Gallup, 2004), for others, the abuse intensifies and becomes more serious (Martin et al., 2004). Abused pregnant or post-partum women have been identified as especially vulnerable to injury-related deaths (Chang, et al., 2005).

In abusive relationships, women are commonly raped and/or sexually coerced (Bergen, 2004; Campbell & Soeken, 1999). The 1993 Canadian Violence Against Women survey (VAWS) (Statistics Canada, 1993) concluded that, since the age of 16, 8% of the women had experienced at least one incident of sexual attack or unwanted sexual touching from a spouse, and a further 12% from a date or boyfriend. In Tutty and Rothery's 2002 study of 108 shelter residents, almost half reported rape or other sexual coercion in their long-term relationships - for a small number, it was a weekly or daily occurrence.

Sexual assaults can result in serious physical injuries; however the negative emotional consequences such as trauma often extend for months if not years. In the context of an ongoing intimate partner relationship, the assaults are likely to be repeated, rather than being a one-time trauma, as is more often the case in stranger or acquaintance rape. As such, the long-term consequences are more devastating. Sexual violence can easily be missed because of the shame that victims often experience.

The ultimate act of violence against abused women is homicide by their partners. The spousal homicide rates for Aboriginal women are eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada Homicide Survey, cited in Johnson, 2006). While spousal murders are rare, they typically occur in the context of long-standing domestic violence. According to Beattie's (2005) analysis of 30 years of data from Canada's Homicide Survey, one in five solved homicides involve one partner murdering the other, whether married, common-law or boyfriends, current or ex-partners. Furthermore, over the past 30 years, Canadian women are four to five times more likely to be the victims of a spousal homicide than are men. When considering the pattern of spousal homicides-suicides, over half (57%) of Canada's familial homicide-suicides involved spouses, the majority of which were committed by males (97%) (Aston & Pottie-Bunge, 2005).

In summary, intimate partner violence has many forms, each with the potential to injure and cause significant, long-lasting emotional and physical trauma. Many of the above abusive behaviours are addressed in Canada's Criminal Code, highlighting the importance of a responsive criminal justice system.

#### Services and Policies to Address Domestic and Sexual Violence

In response to the serious nature of violence against women, numerous federal and provincial legislations, policies and other services have been developed to assist the victims of intimate partner abuse, some of which are the focus of this special edition of *Currents*. These include services such as emergency and second stage shelters for abused women, sexual assault centres, groups for men who abuse partners and specialized domestic violence courts and police units.

Emergency shelters for women developed exclusively to address the safety needs of abused women. The latest Transition House Survey, conducted in 2005 to 2006 by Statistics Canada (Taylor-Butts, 2007), shows that Canada's shelters are well used. Over one-hundred thousand women and children were admitted to over 500 shelters in the year ending March 31, 2004. While a minority of these women and children only needed housing, almost three-quarters were leaving abusive relationships.

Concern about children exposed to domestic violence has emerged as a significant social issue in the past decade, resulting in changed child welfare legislation in some jurisdictions (Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop & Walsh, 2007). In the recent *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*, "Exposure to domestic violence was the second most common form of substantiated maltreatment (an estimated 29,370 cases of substantiated maltreatment, a rate of 6.17 per 1,000 children)" (Trocmé et al., 2005, p. 2).

The criminal justice system has long been critiqued, whether fairly or unfairly, for its response to intimate partner violence. Today, the criminal justice system intervenes in a substantial proportion of cases of domestic violence in Canada and the United States (Tsai, 2000; Ursel, Tutty & LeMaistre, 2008). This has been the result of broad policy changes across North America over the past two decades. These policy changes have occurred at all levels of the justice system including the police, prosecutions, courts and corrections.

Entry into the criminal justice system is usually victim initiated, typically a telephone call to the police during a crisis. Yet, according to the 2004 General Social Survey, relatively high proportions of victims choose not to involve the police: only 37% of women victims and 17% of male victims made such contact (Ogrodnik, 2006). One of the frequently offered reasons for low rates of contacting the police is the view that the

police and the criminal justice system are not helpful to victims. Over time, critiques of the justice system response to domestic violence have resulted in a number of policy and practice changes which put greater emphasis on the safety of victims and holding offenders accountable for their assaults. One of the consequences of these changes has been the introduction of specialized criminal courts (Tutty, Ursel & Douglas, 2008).

Especially for those who are considered at low-risk for re-assaulting partners - typically a first or second offence with only low-level forms of violent acts - groups for male perpetrators are one of the key interventions for domestic violence. As the primary condition to which accused are mandated by the courts, establishing the efficacy of batterer treatment programs is critical, especially as many women stay or return to partners in the hope that they will change as a result of the groups (Gondolf & Russell, 1986). A recent meta-analysis of 22 mostly quasi-experimental evaluations of domestic violence treatment (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004) found no differences between treatment models, but noted that treatment had a significant but small effect on recidivism in addition to the effect of being arrested.

With respect to sexual assault, over the past two decades, the understanding and awareness of sexual offences as well as responses to these behaviours have undergone many changes (Tutty, Jesso, McDonald, & Provost-Smit, 2005). On the legislative front, the 1983 amendments to the Criminal Code replaced the crimes of rape and indecent assault with a three-tier structure of sexual assault. The goals of these amendments were to emphasize the violent rather than sexual nature of such crimes, and to increase victims' confidence in the criminal justice system and willingness to report these crimes to the police. Amendments also eliminated immunity for those accused of sexually assaulting a spouse, removed reference to the gender of victims and perpetrators, and restricted the admissibility of evidence about the complainant's prior sexual history (Kong, Johnson, Beattie, & Cardillo, 2003, p. 1).

Sexual assault centres are recognized as a safe place where professional experts assist victims of sexual assault and abuse. Victims are assured that they have the option of maintaining anonymity with the sexual assault centre staff. They are provided information about their options and what should occur if they choose, for example, to report the assault to the police (Tutty et al., 2005).

Minimally, the institutional shifts to more effectively address the serious nature of domestic and sexual violence have at least raised the profile of these significant social issues. Evaluations of these well-intended efforts must continue, since the victims of the violence rely on these

programs and organizations to safeguard their lives and those of their children. A number of the articles in the special edition of *Current* are evaluations of such programs and services.

#### The RESOLVE Network

The five original Canadian research institutes on violence and abuse were established in 1992 by a joint federal government initiative of SSHRC and Health Canada in response to the tragic murders of 14 women engineering students at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6<sup>th</sup> of 1991. The original network comprised the FREDA Centre (Vancouver), the Manitoba Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence Against Women (Winnipeg), The London Centre (London, ON), The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre (Fredericton, New Brunswick) and the Centre de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur la Violence Familiale et la Violence Faite aux Femmes (CRI-VIFF) in Montreal. The centres developed as partnerships between academics and community service providers and government policy makers committed to pragmatic policy and program-focused research.

In 1997, after extensive community consultations, the Manitoba Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence Against Women expanded to include offices in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The RESOLVE network has affiliated with seven prairie universities, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Brandon University. RESOLVE Alberta has been housed at the University of Calgary since 1997.

The RESOLVE research network is based upon two principles. The first is the afore-mentioned collaboration among university-based researchers, policy makers, service workers and representatives of groups affected by interpersonal violence and violence against women. The second is an action-oriented research and development paradigm focusing on projects with joint research and service policy innovation goals. Research and innovation are conceptualized as mutually reinforcing in that research findings inform policy and program development, which in turn act as testing grounds for theory.

The operations of the three RESOLVE offices are maintained through the generous support of the *Prairieaction* Foundation. Research funding is accessed through government, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and various community organizations. The RESOLVE offices also receive financial and in-kind support from the University of Calgary, University of Manitoba and the University of Regina

Over the years, RESOLVE has conducted an impressive number of research projects on domestic violence in partnership with community agency and government representatives and with funding from a number of federal granting bodies. These include two Social Sciences and Humanity Research Council University Research Alliance (CURA) projects. The first, "Evaluating the Justice and the Community Approach to Domestic Violence across the Prairies" entailed collecting information on three models of specialized domestic violence courts in Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton. Regina, which at the time had no specialization, acted as the comparison. The principle co-investigators, Leslie Tutty and E. Jane Ursel, have since published many of the CURA results in a book by Cormorant Press in 2008, "*What's law got to do with it? The law, specialized courts and domestic violence in Canada.*"

A second CURA awarded to principle co-investigators, E. Jane Ursel and Marlene Bertrand with a team of about 60 co-investigators from both academia and the community, is in its last year. The Healing Journey is a 5-year longitudinal study of the well-being of abused women, with the original sample from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta totalling over 600 women.

A multitude of other projects have been conducted focusing on such domestic violence-related populations as children exposed to domestic violence, Aboriginal populations, immigrant women and individuals with disabilities. Programs that have been evaluated include safe visitation programs, specialized police units that address domestic violence, shelters and prevention programs, to name but a few. The majority of the reports are available for download from the RESOLVE websites: <http://www.umanitoba.ca/resolve/> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/>.

A final notable aspect of the RESOLVE network and its goal of making research meaningful and available is its book series. Five volumes on Aboriginal women, abused women, sexual abuse, prevention and sexual exploitation through prostitution were published by Fernwood Press. Cormorant Press has since taken on the series with one volume on intimate partner violence and another on criminal justice responses to domestic violence. The Canadian research focus and the reasonable cost of these books attests to knowledge dissemination as a major goal of the network.

#### The Special Edition of *Currents*

The articles included in this special edition address a number of topics relevant to intimate partner and other forms of violence, including sexual assaults. This section briefly introduces the submissions and their

authors.

The first article, written by Kendra Nixon explores the lives of women abused by intimate partners in her study of the impact on abused women of provincial child protection legislation that includes an explicit focus on children exposed to domestic violence. These women's in-depth narratives provide powerful feedback about the consequences of such policy directives both on them and on their children.

Dr. Kendra Nixon is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. Kendra recently completed her dissertation, entitled "*The construction of intimate partner woman abuse in Alberta's child protection policy and the impact on abused mothers and their children.*" The study explored how intimate partner violence is conceptualized within child protection policy and the impact on abused mothers and their children. Kendra's research interests include violence against women, mothering in the context of intimate partner violence, child exposure to intimate partner violence, and family and social policy. Since 1999, Kendra has been a research associate with RESOLVE Alberta.

Sarah Fotheringham and Debra Tomlinson conducted an intriguing research study looking at the possibilities for collaboration between shelters for abused women and sexual assault centres, especially given the overlap in women's experiences of both types of violence. The article documents the opinions of 24 services providers from both sectors and presents a number of recommendations that could facilitate conjoint work for these still mostly divided organizations.

Sarah Fotheringham recently graduated with an MSW from the University of Calgary in 2008. Her thesis entitled, "*The Potential for Collaboration between Women's Shelters and Sexual Assault Centres: the Voices of Survivors,*" is a continuation of the research presented in the article. Sarah worked as a front line crisis counsellor for survivors of sexual assault/abuse for five years before returning to school, and is now the Program Analyst, responsible for policy, best practice and program accountability in the Integrative Services division at the YWCA of Calgary.

Debra Tomlinson has worked for over 20 years as an advocate for individuals affected by sexual assault and domestic violence. During her six years as Provincial Co-ordinator of the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres, Deb led a province wide movement that resulted in acquiring provincial government funding for sexual assault centers in Alberta. Currently, she is the Project Development Manager for the Calgary Collaborative Services Centre.

Two Australian authors, Robyn Holder and Elizabeth Moore,



wrote the next two chapters based on their different vantage points in that country. Both are members of an SSHRC Cluster grant, the “Canadian Observatory on the Justice System’s Response to Intimate Partner Violence,” with international membership and led by Dr. Carmen Gill from the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Research Centre in New Brunswick. Robyn and Elizabeth had travelled to Canada for a cluster project meeting and took the opportunity to present at the RESOLVE conference.

Robyn’s article, the key-note presentation for the RESOLVE conference, focuses on criminal justice reform to more adequately address domestic violence in the Australian Capital Territory. Her use of the Greek mythological character, Sisyphus, represents the seemingly endless struggle to end violence against women. The article details criminal justice strategies put into place in the Australian Capital Territory to address this daunting goal.

Robyn Holder has worked in justice, law and service reform for nearly 30 years in Australia and the UK. Since 1996 she has performed the duties of Victims of Crime Coordinator for the Australian Capital Territory, an independent statutory position established under the *Victims of Crime Act 1994* to promote reform, investigate complaints and advise the Attorney General. In 2007, Robyn also became Director of Victim Support ACT and has been a member of the Executive of the ACT Department of Justice & Community Safety since 1997. Robyn is also chair of Victim Support Australasia, and an ex officio member of the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

Prior to her work in Australia, Robyn worked in the Community Safety Unit at the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (UK) from 1987-1995. She was Honorary Advisor on Women’s Community Safety to the Association of London Authorities, a member of the Analytical College of the European Forum on Urban Safety, and a visiting tutor on the Bramshill Police Staff College ‘Violence Against Women Course’. Robyn has written extensively on issues affecting victims of crime in the administration of justice, violence against women and crime prevention. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies at the Australian National University.

In her article, Elizabeth Moore looks at the development of a pilot specialized court to address domestic violence in two Australian areas, rural Wagga Wagga and metropolitan Campbelltown. So many specialized criminal justice responses across the world are centred in urban locations that the comparison of implementing such courts in rural centres rather than urban centres is worthy of research.

Elizabeth Moore has actively pursued a career mix of professional practice and academic appointments, and was awarded a Churchill Fellowship. Elizabeth is currently a Senior Practitioner in Case Management with New South Wales Government and Adjunct Lecturer in Social Work and Human Services at Charles Sturt University's Wagga Wagga campus. Her 15 years of practice includes social casework, management of statutory welfare programs and policy roles in state and national level Special Commissions of Inquiry, on issues of ethical conduct, child protection and the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. From 1998 to 2008, Elizabeth was a full time lecturer at Charles Sturt University, where she taught social policy and case management. Editor of *Case Management for Community Practice*, 2009, Oxford University Press, her other research publications focus on case management and social work relating to the justice system, including youth justice, and the justice response to domestic violence for rural and Aboriginal women.

The article written by Christina Ateah and Ian Cohen shifts the focus from adults to youth, and to the experiences of bullying and the development of trauma. This cross-national comparison of over 1000 post-secondary students provides a retrospective view of peer victimization and its negative consequences, taking off the veil of yet another hidden set of experiences, that of violence to children and youth at school.

Christine A. Ateah, RN, PhD is an associate professor at the Faculty of Nursing, University of Manitoba where she teaches in the undergraduate and graduate programs in the area of child and family health. Dr. Ateah's doctoral work consisted of an examination of the determinants of maternal use of physical punishment with children. She has completed numerous funded research projects in the areas of child health promotion and child abuse prevention including the topics of educational needs of parents of young children, cross cultural experiences with and attitudes toward physical punishment, bullying and victimization experiences, and parenting experiences. Dr. Ateah co-authored a Canadian textbook on human development (2005, 2008) and co-edited a book on family violence prevention (2004).

Dr. Ian Cohen received his doctorate in School Psychology from the College of Education at Temple University, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a graduate student at Temple University, Dr. Cohen was mentored by Dr. Irwin Hyman in clinical and research issues regarding peer victimization, school discipline and PTSD. Following the completion of his doctoral program, Dr. Cohen completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, located in Philadelphia. As a

post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Cohen served as the program coordinator for the Behavior Health in Urban Schools Program. After completing his post-doctoral fellowship, Dr. Cohen accepted a position as a school psychologist in an elementary school in Hewlett, New York.

The breadth and depth of this collection of articles is apparent. The research was certainly well accepted at the conference and having the opportunity to broaden the dissemination to larger and more diverse audiences is welcome. I sincerely hope that you, the readers, find these projects on interpersonal violence as unique and valuable as I do. Hopefully this work can make a contribution to your interests and work and perhaps even assist us in the Sisyphean goal that Robyn Holder reminded us of, to end violence to women, children and, indeed, humanity!

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