

Violence Against Women and Children: Partnering for Change

INTRODUCTION

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In November 2005, the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research (FVRC/CRVF) held its first research day. The theme, Violence Against Women and Children: Partnering for Change, emphasized the necessary dialogue among those involved in conducting research on violence issues in different provinces. This one-day conference provided researchers, policy makers and practitioners in Canada's Atlantic region with an opportunity to share and discuss results of recent research and evaluation projects, and to provide an occasion for networking. The diversity among the topics covered during the day (building community strengths; learning about violence and its effects on children and youth; violence prevention and awareness initiatives; women-centered strategies for ending violence; multiple justice system responses to violence; contextualizing social determinants of health and violence against women; violence prevention program for youth) reflects the dynamism of communities working on violence issues. The Research Day conference increased awareness and understanding about issues surrounding violence against women and their children and how a coherent response to these issues can increase the efficiency of the health care and justice systems. The following cluster of articles is a cross-section of some of the work that was presented. The articles illustrate action-oriented research as it is developed through the MMFC.

Deborah Doherty examines domestic homicides of women in New Brunswick from 1990 until present. She looks at some of the factors associated with nine murder-suicides and provides a case law review of the twenty cases involving the death of women at the hands of a spouse, common-law partner, ex-spouse or partner, or other intimate relationship. Using the cases and other data sources, the article entitled "Domestic Homicide in New Brunswick: an Overview of Some

Contributing Factors" examines some of the social factors that may have contributed to the lethal outcomes, factors such as drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness, and prior criminal record of the perpetrator. It also looks at whether there was a known history of domestic violence. Although the court may consider mitigating or aggravating factors at the time of sentencing, it is not always clear whether the courts recognize family violence unless there has been recorded police intervention. In several cases, the judges referred to troubled, turbulent or stormy relationships - but not to family violence. Ultimately, the goal of the research is to examine the interplay of recurring social factors that appear to be correlated with higher homicide risk factors for women, and to suggest ways to improve responses to family violence through program, service, policy or legislative reform.

While Doherty provides a comprehensive understanding of factors associated with the deaths of women at the hands of spouses, Gilles Rondeau and Christine Drouin examine the process of intervention in family violence situations with a high lethality risk, in order to find better ways to prevent spousal homicide. Their article is the result of two different research projects under the "Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes" (CRI-VIFF). Rondeau and Drouin look at "La gestion des situations à haut risque de létalité afin de prévenir l'homicide de la conjointe," define the types of high lethality risk situations that may be encountered by professionals in various fields and identify the most appropriate interventions to prevent spousal homicide. They also identify the needs of professionals who have to intervene in family violence situations with a high lethality risk. Finally, they look at intervention strategies to prevent the homicide of women. In this part of their article, the authors emphasize the

importance in better equipping crisis intervenors with tools to assess the high risk of lethality.

"The PRISM Evaluation Resource: Feminist Critical Reflection on Anti-Violence Programs in Rural Areas" is an illustration of action-oriented research. It presents results from a three-year research collaboration of academics, government, and community agencies and organizations from across Atlantic Canada, out of which evolved a resource for critical feminist reflection on violence prevention policies and programs. Elizabeth Blaney and Nancy Janovicek draw on rural girls' and women's voices to describe the components of this resource. The aim of Blaney's and Janovicek's work is to identify and enhance conditions and resources that would lead to rural girls and women to live violence-free lives. Ultimately, it is hoped that such research will enable program and policy makers to better respond to violence against girls and women in rural communities.

In their paper "Placing Women's Voices in the Centre of a Strategy for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse," Colleen MacQuarrie and Kelly Robinson discuss prevalence rates and known risk factors for child sexual abuse (CSA); the state of CSA prevention programming; the role of survivors in prevention and the use of strength-based approaches for organizations working with survivors. The authors also offer some suggestions for research and action on prevention of CSA.

In "Les Iniquités socio-économiques et le Partenariat communautaire chez les femmes francophones et acadiennes de l'Atlantique," Rina Arsenault, Nancy Benoit and Anne Brown show the importance of a community partnership in advocating for the improvement of women's lives. The authors present the issues associated with the absence of socioeconomic equity, including female poverty, women's education, violence against women, and women's health, and show how these problems are disadvantaging Francophone and Acadian women in the region.

Carmen Gill, in collaboration with Helene Berman, Margaret Jackson, Gilles Rondeau, Leslie Tutty and Jane Ursel, contributes an article on the development of a new national partnership that originated from the Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Violence ("the Alliance"). Taking its title from the partnership, the "Canadian Observatory on the

Justice System's Response to Intimate Partner Violence" presents the process of reflection by which this partnership has emerged since the year 2004. Gill presents some ideas that are leading the Alliance towards the development of the Canadian observatory, explains the approach that is promoted by the Alliance, discusses the goals and research priorities for the observatory, and identifies the next steps for the development of the observatory in the coming year. The observatory is financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.