

# A Canadian Model for Building University and Community Partnerships: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children

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## Abstract

The importance of Canadian research on violence against women became a national focus after the 1989 murder of 14 women at École Polytechnique in Montreal. This tragedy led to several federal government studies that identified a need to develop centers for applied research and community–university alliances on violence against women. One such center is the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children. The Centre was founded in London, Canada in 1992 out of a partnership of a university, a community college, and community services. The centre’s history and current activities are summarized as a model for the development and sustainability of similar centers.

## Keywords

Canadian research centers, interdisciplinary, violence against women

## Introduction

The Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children was founded in London, Canada in 1992 out of a partnership of a university (Western Ontario),

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a community college (Fanshawe), and community services dedicated to improving services to abuse victims, perpetrators, and their children (London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse). Currently integrated into the university's Faculty of Education,<sup>1</sup> the centre began through a major 5-year federal grant designed to stimulate and enhance applied research on this topic. The centre was one of five centers established in Canadian universities through these grants and is part of an alliance of these centers (other centers are identified in the Partnerships section below).

To illustrate the centre's growth over the past decade, we went from two-and-a half staff with US\$1 million from two grants in 2002 to five staff with US\$6.6 million in open grants in 2009. To indicate the breadth of activities just in the past year, the centre has hosted six major conferences and think-tanks and 12 workshops with 10 different University of Western Ontario faculties, 12 community partners, and six other universities in Canada. Faculty members of the centre are involved in teaching courses, such as violence prevention (safe schools) at the graduate and undergraduate levels for the Faculty of Education and trauma courses for the Faculty of Health Sciences as well as graduate student supervision and participation as thesis examiners. In this article, we provide an overview of our history, organizational structure, and current activities as well as our long-term planning process.

## **Impetus for the Research Centre's Creation and its Current Mission**

The work of the centre was born out of a national tragedy: the 1989 murder of 14 women at École Polytechnique in Montreal by a man expressing hatred of women and feminists. This tragedy led to a number of studies sponsored by the federal government to examine the social context of this violence (Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women, 1991). The federal government commissioned a panel of experts on violence against women to hold formal and informal hearings across the country to examine the depth of these problems. The final report titled, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence—Achieving Equality*, made sweeping recommendations about public education and systemic changes to institutions, including the identified need for more applied research and community–university alliances (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). The centre and other centers developed out of these recommendations by specialized funding made available through federal Social Science and Humanities Research Council and Health Canada grants.

The vision for the centre is a commitment to the development and application of knowledge on the prevention of violence against women and children through the promotion of innovation, collaborative relationships, and gender equality. The mission of the centre is to facilitate the collaboration of individuals, groups, and institutions representing the diversity of the community to pursue research questions and training opportunities to understand and prevent abuse. It serves local, national, and international communities by producing useful information and tools to assist in the daily work against violence toward women and children.

## Scope of Work

The centre is dedicated to education and research on the topic of violence against women and children. The centre initiates and seeks funding for projects relating to a number of themes, including healthy relationships; violence and its impact on health and well-being; and gender inequality and its interactions with racism, ableism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and other forms of social exclusion. The centre conducts research and education that is relevant to practice, policy development and legislative reform in regards to families and intimate relationships, justice, education, health, social services systems, and institutions and workplaces. A central theme is working with antiviolence agencies to continue raising awareness among professionals, family, friends, and coworkers about the warning signs of violence in intimate relationships.

Some examples of approaches and activities that promote research and education include program development and evaluation, identification of emerging issues and important debates, interdisciplinary collaboration among community and academic researchers, and a commitment to the dissemination of research findings—locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. Our education programs focus on public awareness, professional development for various disciplines, and multidisciplinary curriculum development and implementation for undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs at the university and community college levels.

The centre is committed to community development to build capacity for the development and implementation of antiviolence initiatives. We support community-based programs and promote promising practices in our writing and community forums.

## Organizational Infrastructure

The centre is integrated in the Faculty of Education. There is an academic director who is a professor on faculty (Jaffe) and a community director who had worked in the community as a director of a sexual assault center (MacQuarrie). In addition to these positions, we have a research chair, supported for the past 10 years by Scotiabank. This position was initially held by Dr. Melanie Randall, jointly appointed to the Faculties of Law and Women's Studies, for the first 5 years, and was subsequently held by Dr. Helene Berman from the School of Nursing in the Faculty of Health Sciences for the remaining 5 years. The university funds a position of centre manager for financial and organizational responsibilities, as well as a community liaison and administrative support position. We hire research assistants as specific projects and funding allow. For example, at the current time we have a research assistant related to our work with the Chief Coroner's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and organizing think-tanks as well as discussion papers on the topic. The centre reports to the Dean of the Faculty of Education as well as a Management Committee composed of faculty members and senior administrative staff and chaired by the associate dean of education (graduate studies). The centre also benefits from an Advisory Board composed of four members each from the founding partners (Western, Fanshawe College, and the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman

Abuse). The Advisory Board meets three times a year and offers support and research consultation to staff and the Management Committee. The chair of the Advisory Board is a voting member of the Management Committee. The centre also benefits from a wide network of research and community associates with whom we regularly partner on various initiatives. Finally, there are four adjunct faculty members who have appointments in the Faculty of Education and represent diverse interests, such as violence in Aboriginal communities, outreach to Muslim communities, and violence prevention in schools.

## **Financial Operations**

The Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario provides in-kind space and related costs for the centre. The academic director is a full-time faculty member in education and as such his salary and benefits are also paid by the University of Western Ontario. The Provost at the University of Western Ontario also provides a small amount of operating money each year (US\$55,000). All other operating costs for the centre are funded through grants and donations. Where allowed, a 5% administrative fee is included in proposals to fund the operating budget. The total 2009 operating budget for the centre was US\$492,000.

In 2009, the centre held US\$5.8 million in open grants (57%) and donations (43%). Grant funding was received from a variety of federal, provincial, and local organizations. Funders include the Federal Department of Justice, Public Health Agency of Canada, Ministry of the Attorney General, Ontario Women's Directorate, Ministry of Education, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Corporate donors include Scotiabank and Royal LePage. The budget is presented on an annual basis to the centre's Management Committee, which is chaired by the associate dean. In the past year, a 3-year forecast was developed and approved in alignment with future research and training plans.

## **Engaging in Research and Public Education**

Public education and research undertaken by the centre is based on input from, and collaboration with, local, provincial and national partners outlined in the next section. Although the centre's initial name only had "research" in the title, we expanded the name to include "education" to capture the reality that so much of our work involves public and professional education on violence against women and children. In many of our grants, the notions of research and education are intertwined. Our awareness and education initiatives are evaluated as part of our research activities. Similarly, our research is conducted in a manner that promotes education and awareness. Some of this work involves knowledge translation both in regards to our research as well as summarizing the work of other researchers to assist policy makers. Our activities and publications, as well as upcoming workshops and presentations, are maintained on our website ([www.crvawc.ca](http://www.crvawc.ca)). An overview of all the activities are summarized in an annual report provided to our Management Committee and Advisory Board.

## Guiding Perspectives and Principles

The public education and research carried out under the auspices of the centre are highly varied. Some of our work is undertaken in response to particular funding agency requests for proposals, and some projects are undertaken in response to a perceived need and interest within the community and/or by researchers affiliated with the centre. Although we incorporate a range of theoretical and conceptual perspectives, and the substantive areas we investigate are diverse, several principles are commonly embraced in the work we do. Among these are the following: (a) a valuing of feminist participatory methodologies; (b) a belief in the need for multiple “ways of knowing,” including qualitative and quantitative methodologies, or “stories and numbers”; and (c) the recognition that violence is gender based, that gender is a main source of oppression in the lives of girls and women, but that experiences of violence are also shaped by other markers of identity including race, class, ability, and sexual orientation. In this section, we elaborate on these ideas. This discussion is followed by selected examples from our public education initiatives and research projects to demonstrate how these ideas have been operationalized.

## Working in Partnership with Our Communities

All of the work conducted by the centre is carried out in collaboration with our community partners. The composition of the project teams varies greatly, depending upon the focus of the particular study, the expertise needed, and the groups most directly affected. Consistently, we devote a considerable amount of time to ensuring that community partners are afforded safe, respectful, and meaningful roles in the work. This process is at times a challenge, and there are multiple divides that need to be bridged. However, it is our assertion that the effort required to achieve this goal is not optional. Despite increased costs and time, power differentials that stem from deeply entrenched social, political, and historical inequalities that can't be willed away by “being nice,” and inequitable incentives to engage in research, we believe that anything short of full and meaningful partnerships significantly limits the relevance and impact of the findings. Moreover, given that much of our work is conducted with groups that have traditionally been marginalized and silenced, anything other than honest collaboration is, in our opinion, ethically questionable.

A fundamental assumption among feminist scholars is that knowledge ought not to be generated for its own sake, but should be used as a form of social or cultural criticism. The notion of research as praxis, or the combination of research, action, and change is a central tenet embraced by researchers working within any of the feminist research traditions. A feminist agenda then focuses on creating knowledge that has the potential to produce change through personal or group empowerment, alterations in social systems, or a combination of these. Consistent with these ideas, we view research, action, and change not as distinct entities, but as processes that may occur in a complimentary and simultaneous manner.

## Valuing Multiple Ways of Knowing

There is a lingering misperception that doing feminist research necessitates the use of qualitative research approaches, while quantitative approaches are viewed with caution. In part, this distrust of quantitative research stems from the use of numbers to devalue or trivialize the reality of women's experiences in the world. However, the problem does not lie with the methods themselves, but rather with the underlying patriarchal values and beliefs that influence what we study and how we study it. It is our view that there is nothing inherently problematic with quantitative methods, but instead the problem lies with how statistics have been used, in some cases, to further exploit and oppress marginalized groups. Thus, our work incorporates multiple "ways of knowing," depending on the purpose of the particular study, the questions being asked, and the type of change that is sought.

## Addressing Research on Race/Ethnicity/Class/Ability

Theoretically and philosophically, much of our work has followed a trajectory that has been observed within the feminist literature in general, and the violence literature in particular. Although early feminist writings and research tended to claim gender as the primary source of oppression in the lives of women and girls, these approaches tended to overlook other interlocking and intersecting sites of oppression and domination. The essentialism of second-wave feminist frameworks fostered notions of "sisterhood" that implied more sameness than indeed exists (Hill Collins, 2000). With respect to violence against girls and women, this tendency was evident in the commonly heard disclaimer that violence affects everyone equally, regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, age, or ability. Kanuha (1996) addressed this issue, noting that such claims are tokenistic and misguided efforts toward inclusion. As she stated, the "tag line that domestic violence affects everyone equally trivializes both the dimensions that underlie the experiences of these particular abuse victims and more important, the ways we analyze the prevalence and impact of violence against them" (p. 41). According to African American feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2000), in the absence of an analysis that takes into account race, class, and other "markers of difference," the potential to critique and transform various forms of social domination is limited.

In the context of research and public education on violence, the failure to take into account these markers of difference results in generalized and unwarranted claims that threaten the authenticity and validity of our work. More importantly, in the absence of localized knowledge and understandings about the differential impacts of violence on, for example, lesbians, or women of color, or women with disabilities, or any combination of these, it is unlikely that programs and policies will be fully reflective of, or responsive to, the particular needs of these groups. In the following sections, we present examples of some of our research and public education initiatives and campaigns to illustrate how these principles have been applied.

## Research Initiatives

Two national studies focusing on violence in the lives of girls and young women were conducted over the last 10 years. The first of these, *In the Best Interests of the Girl Child* (Berman & Jiwani, 2002), was a feminist participatory study conducted in collaboration with our “sister” centers within the Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Violence. The broad purpose of this research was to examine how violence becomes “normalized” in the lives of girls, and how they are socialized to expect violence as an everyday part of growing up female. Each of the research centers examined distinct aspects of violence in girls’ lives, including experiences of racialization and marginalization among immigrant and refugee girls, girls in the sex trade, and sexual harassment. Ways of addressing this violence were examined by looking at the merits and limitations of gender-segregated and gender-integrated programming, and factors that influence schools to implement antiviolence program initiatives.

Consistent with the feminist perspective, a gender-based analysis was used to inform all aspects of this research. Examining the conditions of girls’ lives through a gender lens was deemed to be critically important for gaining an adequate understanding of the fundamental dynamics of inequality that are at work. Although this premise was true, through the course of this research we became increasingly aware of, and uncomfortable with, the heavy emphasis on gender. Over time, it became quite clear to us that girls’ experiences are shaped through their multiple identities, of which gender is only one; that violence is influenced by the intersecting sources of systemic oppression and marginalization and is differently experienced by girls of color, or gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered girls, or differently abled girls,.

Thus, our follow-up study, *Intersecting Sites of Violence in the Lives of Girls*, reflected this shift among the research team away from a traditional feminist analysis that accords primacy to gender as the central source of inequality, discrimination, and marginalization in the lives of girls and women toward an intersectional feminist analysis. In essence, Intersectionality is a critical social theory concerned with uncovering how structural and political factors intersect to influence individuals and groups (Crenshaw, 1989). It was introduced as a philosophical critique of feminist theory and antiracist discourses of the 1970s and 1980s, which privileged gender or race as the most important sources of discrimination faced by women and minorities. From an intersectional framework and in the context of our research, emphasis was placed on critically examining how various forms of systemic oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism intersect to influence the multi-dimensionality of girls’ lived experiences. Although our understandings and explanations regarding violence in the lives of girls and young women stemmed from the recognition that gender inequality persists in contemporary North American society, our research and theorizing grew out of a broader intersectional perspective that more fully reflects the realities faced by girls and young women.

Early on, we came to understand how important it was for us to create a space where all voices, younger and older, were equally valued. In preparation for the photo novella aspect

of the study, the adult members of the team had drafted an interview guide to be used as a way to shape discussions about the photograph that were taken. This group of young women researchers clearly stated that they did not like the structure of the interview guide and suggested that the process be more open and flexible; thus, the guide was modified in collaboration with the girls and we renamed the process “photo talk.” This type of collaboration provided an opportunity for us to learn more about ourselves and other members of the team as we shared in the risk of opening up to one another, but more importantly we gained richer understandings about the possibilities and meanings of participatory research.

An important issue we have faced in our research concerns the requirement for parental consent for girls and young women below the age of 18. This regulation is problematic and in effect further silences the voices of those who have already been silenced and marginalized. For example, girls who are estranged from their families may be unable to obtain consent. Similarly, for a girl or a young woman who is living in a home where there is violence or substance abuse, obtaining consent is unlikely if parents fear disclosure of “family matters.” In response to these concerns, we petitioned our Institutional Review Board, with some degree of success, to waive this requirement. Our arguments were briefly that Canada recognizes the legal right of young women, age 14 and above, to consent to sexual relations and to request health services; that allowing young people to make decisions on their own behalf is in accord with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory nation; and that the requirement for parental consent for girls and young women who are not of legal age interferes with their right to tell their own stories. The result of our argument was that we were allowed to waive consent for those 16 and above. Although we viewed this outcome as a partial success, the issue is one that requires more in-depth attention.

To enhance the likelihood that our study findings would be used to inform programs for girls and young women, we established national and local advisory committees across the country, comprised of representatives from community agencies that provide services and programs. Particular attention was paid to the inclusion of agencies serving diverse girls, including Aboriginal, racialized, differently abled, rural, and francophone girls. Upon joining the advisory committees, the groups agreed to the development of a statement of principles and an action plan outlining their commitment to working with an intersectional framework in the development of policies, programs, and funding decisions affecting violence in the lives of girls.

From a methodological perspective, this study utilized a range of qualitative, arts-based methods. However, consistent with our belief in the need for “stories and numbers,” a separate quantitative survey is currently underway. Using an intersectional analysis to tap into how violence is differently understood and experienced by diverse groups of youth across Canada, these findings, in combination with our qualitative data, will yield a compelling picture about the realities of violence in the lives of girls and boys, young men and young women.

Another study currently underway is a feminist grounded theory study focusing on the transition to motherhood among three groups of women who have experienced past trauma: Aboriginal women who have experienced historical trauma in the context of colonization,



genocide, and oppression; refugee women who endured premigration trauma; and women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The experience of trauma in the lives of women often has a lifelong impact on survivors. The occurrence of adverse physical and emotional consequences, including problems related to attachment, identity, affect regulation and interpersonal relationships, have been well-documented. Although these effects are particularly salient during the reproductive years, little scholarly attention has been paid to how past trauma shapes and affects the transition to motherhood. In this research, we are interviewing women during the second trimester of pregnancy, and again 4-6 months after their baby is born. The goal is to develop a substantive grounded theory explaining how women who have experienced intimate and systemic/structural forms of trauma negotiate the transition to motherhood. It is anticipated that the findings will ultimately lead to the design and evaluation of interventions and policies aimed at maximizing health among this population. The research is in two Ontario communities by a team of internationally renowned trauma researchers in partnership with community agencies that serve the study populations.

Data collection is currently underway, but several issues have arisen thus far that are of particular interest for the purposes of this article. Although the funding agency stipulates that opportunities must be provided for graduate student trainees, we felt that it was important that Aboriginal community researchers be hired. The inclusion of community researchers is consistent with the mandate of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research—Institute for Aboriginal People's Health, which is concerned with community-based involvement and capacity building. We also took guidance from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which have acknowledged the need for Aboriginal community representatives to be included as active researchers in projects such as this one. This approach furthers the capacity of these organizations to engage in Aboriginal-focused research; it establishes expertise within Aboriginal communities thereby promoting greater self-governance; and it enhances existing community–university relations.

In a study on workplace sexual harassment, a team of community and university researchers questioned how diverse groups of women in Canada define sexual harassment. We concluded that to answer this question requires incorporating race and citizenship into the analysis of sexual harassment. Using data from seven focus groups of Canadian women, we found that the white women with full citizenship rights most easily identify with existing legal understandings of sexual harassment and believe they have the right to report their harassment. For women of color and women without full citizenship rights, issues of racialized sexual harassment emerged as central factors in their harassment experience. Black women with full citizenship rights called into question whether the term sexual harassment captured their experiences. Filipinas working as live-in caregivers on limited visas demonstrated how racism and lack of citizenship change definitions of sexual harassment. Their experiences of harassment combined elements of isolation due to their lack of citizenship, racialized sexual harassment, and abuse. We concluded that intersectional analyses are needed to understand women's harassment experiences and their ability to complain and seek legal recourse.

## **Emerging Research Directions**

We are involved in multiple research projects and partnerships in response to emerging issues. One major initiative is our work in the area of domestic homicides. For the past decade, we have been working with the Office of the Chief Coroner on a Domestic Violence Death Review Committee to help develop a database on domestic homicides in Ontario, including risk factors identified by an interdisciplinary review team. Domestic violence-related deaths, or domestic homicides, have been called the most predictable and preventable of all homicides (De Becker, 1997). They represent 17% of all solved homicides in Canada and 47% of all family homicides (Ogrodnick, 2008). According to the latest annual report of the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (2008) through Ontario's Office of the Chief Coroner, the vast majority of domestic homicides reviewed had at least seven well-known risk markers. The key to preventing these homicides is ongoing research efforts to identify risk factors and promote public and professional education on effective safety planning and risk reduction strategies.

These efforts build on the work of other jurisdictions in the United States who have developed domestic homicide review committees that seek to address the issue of community and agency coordination, collaboration, and communication (see <http://www.ndvfri.org/?id=37945>). One of the major themes identified by the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of Ontario is the importance of government, justice, and violence against women agencies having enough common knowledge about assessment tools to identify women at risk and manage high-risk cases to protect victims from a potential homicide. We have been working on enhancing collaboration among justice and community partners on developing more effective risk assessment and risk management protocols and procedures. We have also focused our research on help seeking in abusive men (Campbell, Jaffe, & Kelly, 2008), and the risks that children faced from domestic violence perpetrators (Jaffe & Juodis, 2006). We have organized a number of public forums on these topics as well as two national think-tanks on this issue, which bring together researchers and practitioners from different Canadian provinces.

Elder abuse is also an emerging area of interest for us. We are engaged in an analysis and synthesis of the theoretical and empirical literature regarding elder abuse. This includes accessing the strengths and limitations of the current state of knowledge, with a focus on gender, cultural, and practice issues. We will identify emerging best practices/promising approaches aimed at health care professionals, and policy and program decision makers across Canada (including those from First Nations and Inuit communities).

Finally, research and writing has addressed the emerging issues of domestic violence and child custody disputes. Legislative reform has recognized domestic violence as an important factor for judges to consider in awarding custody of children, but the family court has struggled to overcome limited resources and the presumption of joint custody and/or liberal visits for parents after separation. Our work has helped to frame concern about victims and their children's safety in cases involving domestic violence and a more differentiated approach to parenting plans (Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks, & Bala, 2008) and some cautions about allegations of parental alienation.

## Public and Professional Education Initiatives

In this section, we describe a number of our public education initiatives and campaigns. We are actively involved in a provincial campaign called, “Neighbours, Friends and Families,” that is designed to raise awareness about domestic violence throughout the community. The program is based in part on the findings of the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (e.g., Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2007), which highlighted the potential benefits of broader public education to prevent potential tragedies by recognizing the warning signs of lethal violence and appropriate community intervention.

The Neighbours, Friends and Families program is now expanding to the workplace based on a recent inquest on a domestic violence homicide-suicide which highlighted the responsibility of employers and coworkers to address domestic violence. New Occupational Health and Safety legislation in Ontario requiring employers to address domestic violence in the workplace is providing many opportunities for workplace training. Our research efforts are being directed to evaluate the potential benefits of such workplace programs on the prevention and early intervention into domestic violence through education, policy and legislative reform in partnership with labor, business, and government.

Our Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign has been adapted for use in Franco-Ontarian communities and Aboriginal communities. Action-Ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes was our partner for the francophone adaptation, and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres led the Aboriginal adaptation. The centre communicates regularly with these organizations about developments in the work to implement their campaigns and we all share information and ideas that lead to innovations in our approach to community outreach.

We assisted the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants to conduct a series of consultations about the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign. Close to 300 participants from immigrant communities attended eleven orientation sessions across the province. During the sessions, participants brought out many creative, practical, and inspiring ideas for future Neighbours, Friends and Families diverse community initiatives, as well as concerns and challenges about the present Neighbours, Friends and Families resources and framework. Overall, the consultations affirmed that the campaign is a relevant starting point and has potential to offer many communities tools they can adapt and use to reach their members.

Currently we have formed an advisory committee of women with disabilities and deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing women to help develop a Neighbours, Friends and Families outreach strategy for disability communities. Information is being gathered through key informant interviews and focus groups with women with disabilities and with a variety of service providers. Organizations that are collaborating with us for this work include the Ontario Association of the Deaf, Canadian Hearing Society, Ontario Rainbow Association of the Deaf, BALANCE, and CNIB. The data will be used to prepare a strategy that reflects the needs of the communities of Ontarians who have disabilities as well as Ontarians who are deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing.

More broadly, the centre is involved in curriculum development for different professional groups found in various sectors such as education, law, health, and social service. This curriculum is intended for undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. Our long-term plan includes playing a leadership role in creating a virtual learning institute in partnership with other educational institutions.

We support efforts at promoting primary prevention in school systems on a number of topics. For example, we have worked on the issue of historical abuse through a number of government inquiries such as the Cornwall Inquiry that delved into the failure of a number of systems and institutions (education, police, legal, church) to deal with sexual abuse allegations. The ultimate goal of this work is to promote prevention and intervention strategies for the education system in regards to child sexual abuse. As well, we have taken part in national and provincial consultations regarding the occurrence of various forms of violence, including racism, sexual harassment, and homophobia. Collectively, these efforts have influenced the development of programming and policy aimed at the prevention of school-based violence.

In partnership with Dr. David Wolfe and our colleagues at the Centre for Prevention Science (Centre for Addiction & Mental Health), we have worked to address healthy relationships for adolescents by developing and evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum-based programs (Wolfe et al., 2009). This program is now delivered in over 1,000 Canadian high schools and has expanded to five U.S. states as part of a comprehensive community approach to youth violence (<http://www.endabuse.org>). Adaptation of these resources for Aboriginal youth in Canada and Alaska is also underway.

We are also working with provincial and local organizations of school boards, teacher federations, parents, and students to educate on the harmful impact of media violence and preventative curriculum and parent engagement. We have developed community forums on the topic, new curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12 on media violence, and parent training. We are in the process of evaluating a train-the-trainer model in which we empower parents to have discussions on the harm of media violence on a formal (e.g., school council meetings) and informal basis (family and friends).

The centre has been involved in a collaborative relationship with leaders from the local Muslim community for several years. We supported an initiative to educate mainstream service providers about the Muslim community, so that they can offer more effective service to Muslim clients. We have also supported Muslim leaders who are speaking out about all forms of domestic violence. Our work has helped to establish a culturally sensitive outreach service for the Muslim Community and more recently a new centre under Muslim leadership that will do research and education about violence against women and children as well as provide culturally and religiously sensitive services.

## **Partnerships**

Our centre was founded on a partnership among community service providers and our university and community college in London. London has always been in the forefront of violence against women because of local innovation. Our police were the first in Canada to consider domestic violence a crime (1981) and develop a formal policy in regards to

filing charges. We were among the first to develop programs for perpetrators of domestic violence, nonresidential services for abuse victims, and specialized programs for children exposed to domestic violence. We are a member of our local Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse [www.lccewa.ca](http://www.lccewa.ca) and that committee has representation on our Advisory Board and Management Committee. The committee is composed of specialized agencies that focus on domestic violence as well as agencies with broader mandates.

At the provincial level, we work with numerous organizations around specific projects. We collaborate with government partners in research and public education. We were part of the Domestic Violence Advisory Council convened by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in the Province of Ontario to provide advice on improving the existing system of services to women to better meet the diverse needs of abused women and their children. In 2009 the Council tabled a report, focusing advice on five priority areas: Equity and Accessibility to VAW Programs and Services; Education and Training; Legal System Response to Abused Women; Threat Assessment and Risk Management for High Risk Cases; and Child Welfare.

With support from the Ontario government, we organized a risk management conference that afforded partners from the justice sector and from community-based services an opportunity to come together to discuss the challenges and benefits of cross-sectoral collaboration and to build stronger relationships. An important goal of the event was to strengthen working relationships to provide the foundation for collaboration, thereby increasing the effectiveness of our responses to high-risk cases of woman abuse/domestic violence. A consensus emerged from the conference that the next steps in this work are to develop guidelines to assist partners in determining how to share information that is normally regarded as confidential in the interests of maintaining safety and to establish training for a basket of risk management tools so that all sectors share common knowledge and understanding and can communicate clearly with each other about risk management. Also with provincial support, we hosted a conference on the promotion of healthy relationships, attended by almost 500 youth.

We worked with partners such as the Canadian Auto Workers and the Industrial Accident Prevention Association to bring together a wide range of stakeholders including labor, management, community advocates, academics, legislators, policy experts, woman abuse experts, human resource professionals, health and safety specialists, trainers, consultants, equity officers, and individuals who have experienced discrimination, harassment, bullying, and violence to think about how to build safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces. Presenters shared expertise on law, policies, and practices relating to standards and strategies for creating and maintaining safe and respectful workplaces; personal and institutional costs of workplace violence; corporate best practices; labor's responsibility and involvement in creating safe and respectful workplaces; addressing workplace violence as an occupational health and safety issue; human rights in the workplace; and domestic violence in the workplace.

Our national efforts focus on the work of the Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Violence. The Alliance exists to build community and academic partnerships to carry out research and public education to eliminate violence against women and children, and family violence. Many of the grants held by individual centres have collaborators and

coinvestigators in the other centres. Aside from CREVAWC, the other centres include FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children—British Columbia; RESOLVE: Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse—Alberta; RESOLVE: Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse—Manitoba; RESOLVE: Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse—Saskatchewan; Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research—New Brunswick; and Le centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes (CRI-VIFF)—Quebec.

Internationally, we anticipate much growth in the coming years. Currently, we are working with the U.S.-based Cut It Out Campaign, dedicated to mobilizing salon professionals to recognize and respond to warning signs that their clients may be experiencing domestic violence. Our Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign has permission to adapt their resources for use in Ontario and will continue to communicate with organizers of the U.S. campaign.

As noted earlier, our 4th R curriculum-based violence prevention program is being delivered in five U.S. states and the Aboriginal adaptation is underway in Alaska. Also in the United States, we are involved in education initiatives with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

We are in touch with a network of international colleagues through memberships in organizations such as the Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International and the International Association on Workplace Bullying & Harassment. We are just beginning to build relationships with partners that will allow us to venture into international collaborations. We are in the very early stages of exploring possibilities for collaborations in Yemen, Rwanda, and Peru, and we are supporting an education initiative with a researcher from Tanzania.

## **Practical Strategies for Establishing and Sustaining a Center**

Looking back over the past 20 years, it is clear that the centre would not have developed or thrived without several key components. The building blocks for establishing and sustaining a center such as ours include strong community partnerships, supportive university leadership, and a commitment to responding to emerging needs in the field. Our partnership with the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse has provided a key link to experts and practitioners across all sectors. These relationships provide invaluable insight into the issues and challenges facing those engaged in the work to prevent and address violence against women and children. As we have grown, we have extended our relationships beyond our local boundaries and much of our work is now provincial or national in scope. Our network of relationships enables us to address complex research questions in community-university alliances with partners in a manner that keeps us grounded in reality and connected to the broader movement for social change to end violence against women and children.

The university (Western Ontario) has made the centre a priority and ensured sustainability and renewal through regular reviews and financial commitments. Being a part of a Faculty of Education has aligned well with our focus on public education and prevention. Our research chairs have provided excellent opportunities for collaboration with other faculties such as Law and Health Sciences.

The centre has not wavered from addressing emerging topics in the field such as the role of the workplace in preventing and addressing domestic violence and the role of the family court in making safety and accountability critical factors in establishing parenting plans after separation in cases of domestic violence. We have worked closely with the health sector to determine the most appropriate roles of health providers in the identification, treatment, and prevention of violence. These topics and others ignite public debate and backlash from members of the community, but also illustrate problems that require enhanced research efforts. Community partners keep us informed on new challenges and trends they identify in the work they do. In return, we share knowledge and shape our research agendas to help respond to emerging trends.

## Summary and Conclusions

Survivors and their advocates have made the issue of violence against women and children a consistent and compelling concern for citizens, communities, and governments over the last 30 years. It was the national tragedy of the murder of 14 women at École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989 that brought us to the realization that we need research to guide and inform our prevention and intervention work. Canada established five centers to promote applied research on the topic of violence against women and children in 1992 as part of a national response to this horrendous event. The Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children was one of those centers. Although issues have changed and evolved, the work today remains as important as ever. We remain committed to respecting and learning from the lived experiences of women and children who experience violence. We recognize that women and children with experiences of violence and the service providers who work with them are the “experts” on their lives and their insights can inform real-world solutions. Their participation is critical in the creation of knowledge that will inform legislation, policies, and programs.

The centre is integrated into the university’s Faculty of Education and we are always working to build relationships and collaboration between academics and community-based experts and advocates and women who experience violence. Bridging “different ways of knowing” can be challenging, but it is also a rich and rewarding experience. Our efforts have helped us to establish a track record of research and public education programs on a wide range of issues. This article examines the origins of the centre and the active program of research and public education underway. The centre’s model of sustainability is based on community partnerships, supportive university leadership, funding commitments, and the willingness to address emerging, yet difficult, issues in the field.

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## Note

1. The Faculty of Education is often referred to as a College of Education in the United States.

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## Bios

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