



# Introduction

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Violence and abuse occur to individuals at all stages of life. The effects can be devastating, not just to the individuals who face it: violence and abuse diminish us as communities and as a society. There are many forms of violence; physical abuse is the most obvious and overt form of violence. However, the kinds of abuse, as well as the times of life and circumstances during which they are experienced, vary, as does the severity of their negative effects and consequences. There are many known reasons why abuse occurs. These causes are multifaceted and multidimensional, and include many environmental, social, economic and psychological factors.

Historical factors have contributed to violence and abuse: long-standing traditions exist in which women and children are viewed as property of husbands and parents; control of their behaviour has often included violent acts. Currently, Section 43 of the Canadian Criminal Code (based on an 1892 law) allows parents, and persons standing in the place of parents, to physically discipline their children provided the force used is “reasonable.” Recently, attention has been directed towards the issues of sibling and elder abuse. Although there is nothing new about such abuse, attention to these issues reflects our increasing awareness and intolerance of a broad range of violence, which was previously overlooked, and/or, at different times, accepted as part of normal family life. It is well-documented that throughout the world most victims of abuse in general are females of all ages.

A number of theories can be considered when attempting to understand the prevalence of violence in our society. One theory suggests that violence is transmitted intergenerationally; this social learning perspective contends that children are socialized to become victims and/or victimizers. Biological factors, such as those related to innate aggression or hormonal influences, are also seen to play a role in the use of violence. Still other factors such as educational attainment, poverty, stress and abuse of drugs and alcohol have all been linked at some level with the use of violence.

Even though there has been an increasing focus on violence and abuse over the last two to three decades, it is very difficult to accurately assess the rates and patterns of interpersonal and familial violence. Victims may be embarrassed by their victimization and/or intimidated by their victimizers. Social policy, justice systems and academic research have all increased their attention to this topic. Although increasing societal intolerance, new policy initiatives and changes in the criminal and family justice system are positive developments, prevention programs need to be given greater priority. No one factor can be said to be causative: a multitude of factors and situations



must be taken into consideration in the development of preventive programming. Clearly, the human costs to our society associated with such acts are incalculable, yet the violence continues. Is it possible to live in a society without abuse and violence? We believe so.

The purpose of this volume is to examine the issues associated with violence and abuse across the lifespan and review programs, practices and policies that have been developed to address these issues. Each chapter addresses specific topics and issues of violence across the lifespan, from early childhood until late adulthood. These discussions highlight the effects of violence commonly associated with an age group: the physical punishment of children; sibling violence, and bullying and other abusive behaviours occurring in childhood; dating violence in adolescence and early adulthood; intimate violence experienced by immigrant women; and abuse of the elderly. Each chapter includes an overview of the particular issue that has been identified and also includes a discussion of prevention programs and strategies that either could be implemented and/or have been implemented and evaluated. We look at the current or potential effectiveness of a number of programs: rigorous analysis of all current programming and of violence prevention in general is not presented. Instead, we indicate some areas needing further research and some effective tools for violence prevention.

Prevention programs are one part of a larger societal approach to addressing violence. Although we cannot hope to change attitudes and practice with the implementation of educational programs alone, they are an important piece of an overall public-health promotion and disease prevention strategy. In this volume, primary prevention programs are considered to be those that are designed for delivery to the appropriate general population; their goal is to change attitudes and practices before problematic behaviours occur. For example, distribution to all new parents of pamphlets describing age-appropriate, positive disciplinary responses to child misbehaviours would be considered a primary prevention strategy for child physical abuse. Secondary prevention programs are those directed at groups of individuals identified as having risk-factors for abusive behaviours: for example, parent education to first-time mothers with limited education and social resources is a secondary prevention program. Tertiary prevention programs have the goal of preventing recurrences of risky behaviours. For example, a mandated parenting program for abusive parents would have the goal of preventing the abuse from recurring.

In the first chapter, the editors, along with Joan Durrant, discuss the use of physical punishment and abuse of children. Based on clear evidence from research studies, the use of physical punishment is strongly associated with physical abuse of children. The authors use the experiences of Sweden, where the use of physical punishment has been outlawed and a successful nation-wide education campaign to improve conditions for families to raise their children in a non-violent manner has been implemented, to argue for



a public-policy prevention strategy in Canada. The authors discuss strategies to decrease the rates of physical punishment of children. In addition, the legal challenge to Section 43 of the Canadian Criminal Code is summarized.

In the second chapter Caroline Piotrowski and Afshan Siddiqui discuss one of the least well-understood and often minimized forms of violence: sibling violence. Its occurrence is not uncommon, accounting for a reported 18 percent of police-reported physical assaults within families during the year 2000 (Statistics Canada 2002). Within most families it would seem, a certain amount of physical aggression between siblings is commonplace and, at times, almost expected. However, sibling violence and abuse can have devastating and lifelong effects on victims and, in some cases, result in fatal consequences. Parents may be unaware that the violence between their children is anything but “normal” and, in turn, are often ill-prepared to deal with it. Although there are no programs developed exclusively to prevent sibling violence, programs that have been developed to decrease violence more generally, directed toward individual families, as well as school-based programs, are reviewed as to their relevance to this issue.

Leslie Tutty and Cathryn Bradshaw, in Chapter Three, describe four forms of violence against children and youth: bullying, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexual assault, and the issues and overlap among and between them. These authors stress that, although most violence is perpetrated against females, each form of violence reviewed also includes male victimization. School-based violence prevention programs are reviewed with respect to the research about what best prevents violence against children and youth. The authors conclude that prevention required the creation of a non-violent school culture, utilizing a multifaceted approach; however they concur that this will not occur as a result of brief school-based programming alone. Broader systems change that involves adults assuming responsibility for child protection will be required; such preventive programs also need to include educators, school staff, parents and community, as well as students.

Dating violence is the subject of Chapter Four by Robyn Legge, Wendy Josephson, Christina Hicks and Leslie Kepron. Such violence reportedly occurs in about one-third of dating relationships. Victims are both male and female, but assaults on females are more frequent and are more severe. Violence in a dating relationship is discussed with special attention to risk factors, forms of assault and impact on victims. Prevention strategies, in particular an evaluation of the school-based Red Cross dating violence prevention program *What’s Love Got to Do With It?* are discussed. The evaluation procedure for these kinds of programs is illustrated in the discussion. The intent of such programs is to reduce the likelihood of adolescents experiencing violence in a dating relationship, while promoting the establishment of healthy relationships. Evaluations from the Red Cross program indicate that significant improvements can be made as a result of



participating in the program, at least on a short-term basis.

It is a well-known fact that violence against women in intimate relationships is a serious issue in society. Immigrant and refugee women face particular challenges and issues in relation to their experiences with violence in general, and specifically when seeking help within the social-service, health and justice systems. In the fifth chapter the issue of violence and abuse among immigrant and refugee women is discussed by Paula Migliardi, Esther Blum and Tuula Heinonen. A number of factors—related to cultural differences, isolation and language proficiency—contribute to difficulties in reporting and seeking help or recourse. A capacity-building program established for immigrant women in Winnipeg called the Women’s Action Against Violence (WAAV) is examined for its potential to prevent domestic violence. Preliminary evaluation findings indicate that WAAV was received positively by participants, particularly because it presented information on domestic violence in a manner that was culturally sensitive and therefore uniquely different from mainstream programming.

In the last chapter Pamela Hawranik and Elizabeth McKean discuss the issue of abuse of older adults. As the proportion of our population who are seniors increases, so does the risk and incidence of their abuse. The elderly are prone to experiencing abuse for a number of reasons, including the increased likelihood that disease, frailty and dementia may make them less able to protect themselves. The authors present an overview of the current prevalence of elder abuse and neglect in Canada, including issues related to its identification and reporting, as well as those regarding relevant policy, program planning and practice. Prevention programs for elder abuse are scarce. Therefore, the discussion on prevention strategies focuses more on the types of programs that could be developed and/or enhanced rather than current programming examples.

Our hope is that the information presented in this volume can be beneficial for individuals who currently are or will be working with populations at risk of abusing or being abused. This book provides a foundation for understanding the issues and possible solutions to the issues of violence and abuse. It can provide a basis for informed prevention planning and program implementation and be useful to undergraduate and graduate students as well as service providers in the social and health sciences. Service providers are keenly aware of the devastating consequences of abuse and violence. There are no simple steps to eliminate violence and abuse from our society. It may seem inconceivable that in our lifetime we can make the necessary changes in our society so that we can live without having to deal with the consequences of pain and injury from abuse. We believe that, with each successful program, policy and practice established to address the issue, and, more importantly, to actually prevent its occurrence, the possibility of a society where it would be rare to experience the pain and suffering of abuse and violence gets ever closer within our reach.