Violence Against Women: Critical Issues – International Perspectives and Promising Strategies

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Overview

• Part 1:
  – Trends in scholarship on violence against women

• Part 2:
  – Prevention: An international review
Part 1

• Trends in scholarship regarding men’s violence against women
  – Debates over gender and violence
  – Types of violence
  – Other trends
Trends in scholarship

• Debates over the definition and measurement of violence in relationships and families
• Debates over the patterns and prevalence of violence
Defining and measuring domestic violence

- **Narrow** approaches:
  - Focus on physically aggressive acts

- **Broad** approaches
  - Include a greater range of physical and sexual behaviours which cause harm
  - And non-physical behaviours (verbal, psychological, emotional abuse)
  - And controlling and coercive strategies
  - Comprising a systematic pattern of power and control
Domestic violence

• A pattern of behaviours, linked by power and control

• Physical violence typically is accompanied by other forms of abusive and oppressive behaviour. Such as;
  – Threats of violence, intimidation, sexual assault, coercion, emotional abuse, financial control, insults and mind-games, control and isolation.
  – And minimising or denying the violence, refusing to accept responsibility, and blaming the victim.
Coercive Controlling Violence
The ‘Conflict Tactics Scale’

- The source of most claims to gender symmetry in DV (and the source of claims about “1 in 3”).
- An acts-focused approach.
- Focuses on ‘counting the blows’:
  - “Have you or your spouse, in the last year, ever committed… [a range of acts].”
- Other data finds strong gender asymmetries.
Methodological problems with the CTS

- Asks only about acts, and ignores their impact, meaning, and history (who initiated it, who got hurt, what has happened before, etc.)
- Leaves out sexual abuse, etc.
- Relies only on one partner’s reports, despite poor interspousal reliability
- Uses samples shaped by high rates of refusal particularly among individuals perpetrating or suffering severe DV
- Draws only on married and intact couples and excludes violence after separation
Contrasts in women’s and men’s experience of domestic violence

• Women are far more likely than men to
  – Be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence
  – Be sexually assaulted
  – Sustain injuries
  – Fear for their lives
  – Experience a range of controlling tactics
  – Experience violence after separation.
Gender contrasts: experience

- **Frequency:**
  - Women are more likely than men to experience repeated, and frequent, incidents of violence, whether from current or former partners.

- **Sexual violence:**
  - Women are more likely than men to be sexually assaulted by a partner.
  - A greater proportion of the intimate partner violence women than men experience involves sexual violence.
Gender contrasts: impact

• Perceptions of the violence:
  – Women subjected to violence by their male partners feel frightened, helpless, trapped, etc.
  – Men are ‘not bothered’, see it as insignificant or ludicrous or even admirable, and see its impact as largely inconsequential

• Women show higher levels of fear than men of their partners’ violence
  – Not because of greater fragility, but because the violence is worse.
Gender contrasts: Perpetration

- Women’s perpetration of violence is much more often than men’s in self-defence.
- Women are more likely to perpetrate partner violence out of emotional expression, self-defence, or retaliation. Men are more likely to perpetrate… for instrumental reasons.
  - Although women also may use violence to gain or maintain power.
Gender contrasts: Reporting

- Both men and women contribute to:
  - the underestimation of men’s violence against women; and
  - the overestimation of women’s violence against men.

- Interspousal agreement on domestic violence is low to moderate.

- Men are less likely than women to report their own perpetration of violence.
Gender contrasts: reporting cont’d

• There is mixed evidence regarding whether male victims of domestic violence are less likely than female victims to report their experience.
  – There is some evidence that males are *more* likely than females to report.

• Lower proportions of men may report physical aggression by partners because they do not see it as serious or threatening.
So...

• Domestic violence (coercive controlling violence / intimate terrorism) is less common than we have claimed.

• Domestic violence is largely a problem of men’s violence against women.

• If we do not pay attention to both women’s and men’s experiences of victimisation and perpetration, we will commit errors of fact, of theory, and of intervention.
Trends in scholarship cont’d

- Recognition of diversity, in:
  - Patterns of violence or perpetration
  - Perpetrators

- I.e., there are different types of domestic violence, with differing causes, dynamics, and impacts.
Different kinds of violence?

• *Intimate terrorism / Coercive controlling violence*
  – More severe violence, used by one partner (i.e., asymmetrical), plus other controlling tactics, to assert or restore power and authority (i.e., instrumental). Tends to escalate, and injuries are more likely.

• *Situational couple violence*
  – Minor violence, by both partners, which is expressive (emotional) rather than instrumental. Does not escalate over time, and injuries are rare.
Concerns regarding such typologies

- How coercive control is measured
- Emphasis on physical forms of violence
- Practice concerns
  - Who makes the assessment?
  - How to translate to practice
  - Risk of making the wrong assessment
Trends in scholarship cont’d

• Emphasis on dynamics of coercive control
  – Violence against women as fundamentally a political or ethical issue…

• Emphasis on links between different forms of violence.
  – E.g., the intersections of domestic violence and sexual violence
Trends in scholarship cont’d

• Examination of particular forms of or dimensions to violence
  – In particular populations
  – In particular contexts
  – System responses
  – Victim-survivors’ strategies of management and resistance
  – Trajectories or pathways
Trends in scholarship cont’d

• Debates over the social and structural foundations of violence
  – Vs psychological theories.
  – Men’s use of coercive control against female partners is enabled by persistent gender inequalities (Evan Stark).

• Intersectionality:
  – Forms of social difference such as class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability
  – Local, national, and global contexts
Trends in scholarship cont’d

• Growing visibility of verbal, psychological, and other forms of abuse
• Shifts in the theorisations of attitudes
  – E.g., distinction between ‘hostile’ and ‘benevolent’ sexism
• Increased attention to evaluation
• Methodological sophistication
Shifts in men’s violence against women itself

- Shifts in the contexts for men’s violence against women
  - The pornographication of popular culture
  - Positive and negative shifts in community attitudes

- New mediums for abuse
  - New forms of abuse, such as non-consensual sexting
  - New media for old forms of abuse such as stalking.
Further shifts

• Shifts in family law: children’s increased contact with violent fathers
• Shifting patterns of poverty and economic and social inequality
Part 2: Prevention

• Most prevention programs do not work across individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels.

• Many do not address the core driver of VAW, gender inequality.
The importance of programming across the ecological model

- Gender inequalities are fundamental to men’s violence against women.
- Gender inequalities are present, and maintained, at multiple levels of society.
- Transforming gender inequality to prevent VAWG...
IMBALANCE OF POWER / GENDER INEQUALITY

DISCRIMINATORY LAWS & POLICIES
- Lack of funding
- Impunity by decision makers
- Explicit support of VAWG

INEQUITABLE NORMS & PRACTICES
- Health, law, security not responding
- Religious and cultural justification
- Deprioritizing VAWG
- Lack of political will to implement law and policy

STIGMA, SHAME & SILENCE
- Internalized acceptance of male superiority/female inferiority
- Acceptance of men's control
- Men's use of VAWG
- Victim bears costs

DOMINANT MASCUINITY / SUBMISSIVE FEMINITY
Transforming masculinities through combined changes across the social ecology
Societal level: From discriminatory laws and policies to supportive infrastructure

- Laws and policies...
  - The most important influence on positive government action is women’s movements’ advocacy.

- The criminal justice system shapes community perceptions of VAW.

- Law and policy are vital for establishing prevention strategies.
Societal level: From discriminatory laws and policies to supportive infrastructure

- Prevention also requires societal-level transformation in the health, education, security and justice sectors.
  - Example: Investing in Prevention: *Australia’s National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*

- Funding for VAW is associated with reductions in assault.
Community level: From inequitable norms and practices to an enabling environment

- Work closely at the local community level, with key stakeholders and/or prominent figures.
- Intervene in particular communities.
- Understand local risk and protective factors.
- Support survivors of violence, and men who are trying to be non-violent.
- Program Example: Puntos de Encuentro (Nicaragua)
Interpersonal level: From stigma, shame and silence to positive social norms

- Address friends, parents, siblings and neighbors.
  - Using e.g. small group discussion.
- School-based interventions
- Program examples: Safe Dates; Healthy Relationships
  - Program duration matters…
- Program example: Yaari Dosti (India)
  - Produced declines in men’s perpetration
Interpersonal level: From stigma, shame and silence to positive social norms

• ‘Gender-synchronised’ approaches (working with both women and men)
  – Program example: Stepping Stones (South Africa)

• Combine community education with outreach and mobilisation.
  – Program example: SASA! (South Africa)
  – Program example: Tostan (Senegal, and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa)
Individual level: From dominant masculinity and passive femininity to support and accountability for men and opportunities and empowerment for women

- Each individual must be seen and supported to be a potential agent of change.
- This requires critical reflection about their own and wider societal values and behaviour.
- Program example: Bell Bajao! (India)
  - Calls on men and boys to challenge violence against women with bystander intervention in intimate partner violence
Individual level *cont’d*

- **Work with victims / survivors**
  - 22 studies: Show positive outcomes for both women and their children, e.g. decreased depression, lower stress, greater knowledge and increased use of services.
  - But few studies report decreases in actual victimisation.

- **Work with perpetrators / batterers**
  - Little evidence of effectiveness.
  - 18 studies: Only 2 reported significantly positive results
  - Methodological weaknesses: high dropout rates
Individual level *cont’d*

- Economic empowerment
  - Program example: IMAGE (South Africa, Tanzania, Peru): Combines microfinance with 10 participatory training and skills-building sessions
So…

- There is growing experience and evidence.
- One-off activities and broad awareness campaigns, by themselves, are insufficient to create real and substantial change.
- There is no one template or magic bullet.
- But, there are lessons…
## Principles of Effective VAWG Prevention Programming

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<th>More effective</th>
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<td>Integrated programming</td>
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<td>One-off activities/trainings/events</td>
<td>Sustained community engagement</td>
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<td>General awareness raising/sensitization</td>
<td>Theory-driven communication campaigns</td>
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<td>Legal reform as strategy for deterrence</td>
<td>Legal reform as strategy to support social norm change</td>
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<td>Ad hoc, sporadic efforts</td>
<td>Systematic, coordinated, sustained programming</td>
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<td>Messaging</td>
<td>Inspiring critical thinking and reflection</td>
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<td>Lack of local and contextual knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding context and culture</td>
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<td>Punitive, shame and blame interventions</td>
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<td>Technical quick fixes</td>
<td>Sustained efforts with a gender-power perspective</td>
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<td>Considering VAWG as an event</td>
<td>Considering VAWG within a broader context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working in sector or population silos</td>
<td>Multi-sectoral efforts that engage both women and men</td>
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Final thoughts

• Multi-faceted, longer-term programming makes more change.
  – Involving strategic partnerships with a shared feminist analysis.

• Feminist and women’s movements must be engaged. And resourced.

• Preventing VAW requires transformation in gender power inequalities.
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Dr Michael Flood’s publications:
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