Guest Editors' Introduction

Lethal and Nonlethal Violence
Against Women by Intimate Partners:
Trends and Prospects in the United States,
the United Kingdom, and Canada

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress toward equality, development, and peace.

Kofi Annan, United Nations
Secretary General (quoted in
United Nations Development Fund
for Women [UNIFEM], 2003, p. 1)

Across the world, at least one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime (UNIFEM, 2003; United Nations Womanwatch, 2003). Most of this abuse is inflicted on women by their current or former partners. Such abuse not only physically and emotionally cripples its victims but also devastates lives, torments children, fractures communities, and stalls development. For example, in Cambodia, 16% of women are physically abused by their husbands; in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the rate climbs to 22%, 29%, and 30%, respectively. The corresponding figure is 52% in the West Bank (UNIFEM, 2003). According to findings from surveys carried out around the world, 50% of all women who are murdered in a given year are killed by their current or former husbands or partners (UNIFEM, 2003).

Fortunately—and due to the relentless efforts of feminists, profeminist men, and human rights activists—international laws, agreements, treaties, and conventions have increasingly conceptualized violence against women as a serious violation of human rights (see United Nations, 1981, 1993). Currently, more than 45

countries have developed specific legislation on "domestic violence." In addition, 97 countries are signatories to and 174 countries have signed ratifications/accessions or successions to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1981). However, we must immediately note that domestic violence is not random, as the vast majority of victims are women (UNIFEM, 2003). Moreover, lack of adequate resources, entrenched cultural and patriarchal practices, and the frequent absence of political will to enforce national/international policies continue to hamper progress in protecting the world's women from the transgressions of their intimate partners (UNIFEM, 2003; United Nations Womanwatch, 2003).

When it comes to intimate partner violence against women, developed nations are not that much better off than most of their developing counterparts. In North America and the United Kingdom, for example, the incidence and prevalence of violence between intimates continues to be a well-documented but nonetheless disturbing fact. The most recent North American figures indicate that victims of spousal or intimate partner violence represent 18% to 20% of all victims of reported violent offenses (Rennison, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2001; Trainor, 2002). Women account for 85% of those victimized. In addition, although homicide rates for spouses or intimate partners have shown an overall decline during the past decade, such events still occur at an alarming rate. For example, in the United States, 1,247 women and 440 men were killed by an intimate partner in 2000 (Rennison, 2003). This number is more than 12 times the total number of U.S. fatalities in the Iraq War.

In Canada, homicide rates are considerably lower. Nevertheless, 2,600 Canadian women and men were killed by a spouse since 1974, and again, the vast majority of these victims were women (Dawson, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001; Trainor, 2002). Moreover, in 2001, there were 86 spousal homicides in Canada, up from 68 in 2000. This represents a sharp rise in the number of Canadians killed by an intimate partner, and the numbers are even higher when young women killed by their boyfriends are added to the figure (Statistics Canada, 2002). Whether 2001 is an anomaly to the declining trend since the early 1990s or whether it signals a new rising trend remains to be seen. Likewise, in Eng-

land and Wales, almost half of all the female victims of homicide were killed by a current or former male partner (Flood-Page & Taylor, 2003). Similar to Canada and the United States, a much smaller percentage (5%) of male victims in England and Wales were killed by female partners.

Since the 1970s, North American and British researchers have been examining this darker side of family life, contributing to a rapidly growing body of theory and research. There are also cross-national efforts, both in theory/research and in social activism. This special issue of *Violence Against Women* is devoted to highlighting some of the most recent work in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada that examines lethal and non-lethal violence between intimate partners. We feel that this is a timely focus and recollection given that about three decades have passed since grassroots feminist collectives and consciousness-raising groups identified violence against women as a serious social concern (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 1992). Paralleling the increased attention to intimate violence has been a growing interest in and commitment to efforts to reduce this type of violence. We primarily (but not exclusively) focus on violence against women by their male intimate partners because that type is vastly overrepresented in intimate violence (Gartner, Dawson, & Crawford, 1999; Johnson, 1996; Radford & Russell, 1992; Sev'er, 1997, 1999, 2002a). One of the five papers in this collection explores the dynamics underlying women's violence in same-sex couples.

In the past decade, another noteworthy trend has emerged. Researchers have begun to document declines in rates of violence in North American society and, more important for the purpose of this issue, in rates of both lethal and nonlethal forms of intimate partner violence (Browne & Williams, 1993; Dawson, 2001; Dugan, Nagin, & Rosenfeld, 1999, 2003; Pottie-Bunge, 2002; Puzone, Saltzman, Kresnow, Thompson, & Mercy, 2000). A flurry of research examines the various factors that may be contributing to these declines. We are now taking a backward glance at what the past couple of decades have achieved with respect to understanding, intervening in, and preventing this type of violence. However, the unexpected and sharp rise in 2001 Canadian rates reminds us once again that we must never forfeit our vigilance on this important problem.

We have initiated this special issue so that practitioners, scholars, and policy makers might have the opportunity to examine more carefully where we are today in our accumulation of knowledge about intimate partner violence, at least as far as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom are concerned. We are also interested in seeing how this research informs us about intimate violence against women in other, less scrutinized parts of the world. More important, we hope to identify which parts of the world need the greatest attention so that we may continue to address the problem of violence within intimate relationships and within the family in general. With the proliferation of research and knowledge about this phenomenon across disciplines and countries, we believe that we have achieved a level of expertise and, subsequently, a greater understanding of intimate violence against women. This does not mean, however, that our work is done; rather, it has only just begun. With increasing knowledge, new concerns arise that highlight the complexities of the issues, such as how to deal with high-risk groups or pockets of society that have so far been neglected in our earlier attempts to address the problem. To make crucial and valid decisions about what a future research agenda should entail, we need to determine what we actually know today.

Prior to the 1970s, there were virtually no data, let alone an overt acknowledgement that violence between intimate partners was widespread. Because of the efforts that now span more than three decades, it is easy to become sanguine about the progress that has been made in reducing intimate or familial violence. It is easy to forget that in rural areas of both the developing and the developed worlds, violence experienced by women at the hands of their intimate partners may be even worse than the situation we glean from our urban-based studies of this phenomenon. It is easy to overlook the fact that the advances made in one country or region may not be generalizable or applicable to other regions or to developing parts of the world with different political, cultural, and religious systems. It is absolutely crucial, then, to remember where we were a few decades ago to understand where others may be today. It is also crucial to understand where we are today to figure out where we need to go to combat intimate violence against women, which is nested in a continuum of violence.

During the 1970s, as increasing attention was given to woman abuse, the first shelters for abused women and their children were opened. At that time, there was little public or professional awareness or understanding of the magnitude, extent, or consequences of intimate partner violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 1992; Sev'er, 2002b). Victims of abuse—predominantly women—were treated as if their victimization was an individual issue, not a societal one, and they were perceived as having emotional or psychological problems. Cultural, social, and religious views about the preservation of the family often transcended women's (and their children's) right to live free of violence in their own homes. During the early 1980s, however, as a result of the increasing number of individuals and organizations that became involved in the domestic violence movement, public awareness about violence within the family increased and public outrage grew (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Shecter, 1982).

In response to growing demands, both from the community and from feminist activists and grassroots organizations, governments in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada began funding shelters and counseling services for victims of abuse. At the same time, an increased emphasis on the criminal nature of wife assault developed, resulting in the introduction of mandatory charging and pro-prosecution policies (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Moreover, at least in North America and the United Kingdom, large-scale public education campaigns were launched to increase awareness about intimate and familial violence. Simply put, the issue of violence against women within intimate relationships became accepted as a serious and legitimate social issue. By the late 1980s, the pervasiveness of the problem had been recognized by many Western societies, and procedures for identifying and preventing abuse were rapidly implemented into broader health and social service programs. Although the 1990s saw economic cutbacks and increased demands for fiscal accountability that had a negative impact on the domestic violence movement, we are beginning to see a much-needed resurgence in both public and professional commitment to this issue. That does not negate the fallout of the past decade, however. Increasingly conservative political and economic climates that reign still pose a danger for the hard-won advances (Sev'er, 2002b). Neither can we take comfort from the

advances and the accomplishments in the developed parts of the world without insisting on a global level of understanding and eradication of the pandemic violence of men against their intimate partners.

As a result of the research mostly conducted in North America and the United Kingdom, we now know that there are distinctive characteristics, risk factors, and patterns associated with intimate partner violence and, more specifically, with violence against women by their male intimate partners (Campbell et al., 2003; Gartner et al., 1999; Johnson, 1996; Johnson & Hotton, 2001; Mouzos, 1999). Although this accumulated knowledge brings a degree of comfort, we must still be diligent against stereotyping already disadvantaged groups (e.g., the poor, the young, ethnic minorities, immigrant enclaves) by reifying statistically generated profiles of risk. We must also guard against using Western types of knowledge as a cookie-cutter approach to the understanding of complex cultural sensitivities in gendered relations in other parts of the world.

In the Western world, we have shelters available for victims of intimate violence, but the available spaces hardly meet the overwhelming demand for them (Michalski, 1995; Sev'er, 2002a, 2002b). Treatment programs are offered to batterers, and educational and media campaigns are run to educate the general public and future generations, with important but limited success (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1995). These societal changes are acting as important mechanisms for engendering changes in formal state responses to intimate or familial violence, with some success. The police and the courts in the Westernized states now better recognize and respond to intimate partner violence as a serious crime. In addition, new legislation and regulations that target intimate violence has led to a redefinition of this type of violence from a private matter to be dealt with informally to a public concern that requires formal intervention.

At the international level, more efforts are being expanded to classify violence against women as a crime against humanity. Starting with the Universal Human Rights Declaration (1948) and the United Nation's conferences organized in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995), international efforts increasingly emphasize the unacceptability of vio-

lence against women. Currently, two important UN conventions see violence as an equal rights issue (United Nations, 1981) and hold the signatory states morally responsible for the protection of women from violence (United Nations, 1993).

There is reason, then, to be cautiously optimistic about what has been achieved, both in the West and globally. However, with each achievement, there comes the recognition of new problems and concerns that need to be addressed. For example, we know much less about the types and extent of abuse women in the developing world experience at the hands of their partners and find it much harder to change the cultural patterns that feed into the gendered patterns of abuse. We know even less about how patriarchal states respond to such violence, even when they appear to partake in international treaties and conventions. We know very little about rural women's experiences of intimate violence because of the increased obstacles they face to access any kind of help (Logan, Walker, Cole, Ratliff, & Leukefeld, 2003). It is increasingly recognized that domestic violence resources are disproportionately allocated to urban areas and virtually nonexistent in some rural domains. As a result, rural women are at a disadvantage (and at higher risk) if and when they experience domestic violence. We are just beginning to understand poor women's vulnerability to violence in public housing (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2003: Renzetti & Maier, 2003).

There are indications that some of the policies and programs now available for abused women may not be achieving their hoped-for results for a variety of reasons. For example, one unexpected and undesirable outcome of mandatory charging and prosecution policies are suspicious reactions from some ethnic and racial enclaves that do not understand or trust the Western criminal justice system and, therefore, are reluctant to have this system intervene in their personal relationships. At the same time, despite the proliferation of shelters in the past three decades, women are still being turned away because of lack of space, and the situation has been exacerbated by dwindling economies and funding crises (Sev'er, 2002b).

With respect to theory, there has been surprisingly little discussion to date about the relative use of the theoretical frameworks that have evolved to explain the phenomenon of intimate partner

violence (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002). Furthermore, although this body of research has been vital to policy development in the area of intervention and prevention of intimate partner violence, there has been little discussion about how theory relates to policy and practice—in other words, what has been learned from these endeavors and what works best? Moreover, Western theories have been criticized by Eastern feminists for their top-down and dismissive attitudes that show little regard for diverse cultural complexities.

The articles in this special issue represent examples of ongoing research by those who applaud the achievements we have discussed in this introduction but who also acknowledge that much more work needs to be done. We believe that this special issue is a modest but important contribution to the continuing commitment to eradicate intimate violence against women. The five articles that are included search for and propose new knowledge as well as explore both theoretical refinement and methodological insights.

Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, and Lewis's article opens this special issue with an intriguing comparison of men who kill their intimate partners (IPM) with men who kill other men (MM). Comparison variables are drawn from extensive case files and include childhood and adulthood variables as well as the circumstances prior to and surrounding the murder. With only a few exceptions, the MM group's characteristics fit much more closely with the risk factors generally associated with murderers. The IPM group, on the other hand, shows much more "ordinary" or "conventional" characteristics, with a significant exception on one dimension: Their prior violent offenses, if any, are significantly more likely to have targeted women. Moreover, the situations surrounding the intimate partner murders were much more likely to involve longstanding disputes, contested relationships, and separations initiated by the victim. Dobash et al.'s work clearly shows that although the IPM group may appear to be much more "ordinary" than the MM group, these are not really "ordinary" men or "ordinary" people. They are killers who have a long and specialized career of violence against women and thus, they may indeed be "in-character" when they commit their lethal crimes.

Dobash et al.'s study diverges in two interesting ways from the North American findings on intimate partner violence. First, guns were used in very few IPM murders, whereas in the United States (less so in Canada), the presence of guns is one of the most important risk factors. This difference most likely reflects the strict firearm laws in England as opposed to the feeble ones in the United States. We cannot know for sure how many murders that gun control prevents, but unfortunately as Dobash et al.'s research shows, less access to guns does not seem to prevent intimate partner murders because some men use other gruesome means (strangulation, stabbing) to commit this crime. Second, Dobash et al. do not find common-law relationships to be a significant factor in IPM murders, whereas in U.S. and Canadian research, women in common-law relations are at greater risk than their married counterparts. It is not easy to explain this difference, but it does confirm our belief that there needs to be caution in generalizations made on the basis of North American findings alone. Cross-cultural comparisons are needed to understand the complexity of violence against women.

Unlike the Dobash et al. article that focuses on men who kill women and other men, Glass, Koziol-McLain, Campbell, and Block concentrate on female perpetrated intimate femicides and attempted femicides (IFF). Although IFF is not very common—.05% of all intimate homicides—the article clearly shows that intimate partner violence occurs among lesbian couples, and some women do kill their female partners/lovers. After interviews with people who were closely related to the victims of same-sex femicides and after interviewing survivors of attempted femicides, Glass et al. find that the risk factors in same-sex intimate killings/assaults are astonishingly similar to the risk factors in their more frequently studied heterosexual counterparts. Estrangement or threats of leaving, presence of earlier violence, controlling behaviors and/or jealousy, drug or alcohol consumption (especially binge drinking), and the presence of weapons (especially guns) were the major risk factors. What Glass et al. also observe but do not classify as one of the high-risk factors is the poverty and high congestion in the living conditions of these troubled same-sex couples. In one case, the victim had 7 children. In another case, there were 12 children and 4 additional adults shar-

ing the living space of the victim. In studies of suicide, poverty and congested living spaces have been found to be highly correlated with completed or attempted suicides (Bagli & Sev'er, 2003). Maybe these factors should also be systematically taken into account in future studies of intimate femicides.

Having read the Dobash et al. and Glass et al. articles back to back, a question that comes to our minds is whether women who kill their female intimate partners appear as "ordinary" as men who kill their female intimate partners. Although the very small occurrence of the IFF makes comparisons difficult, Glass et al.'s findings show that IFF women may more overtly fall into "high-risk" characteristics than male killers of female partners. Future research needs to further explore these contrasts.

Douglas Brownridge's article deals with the common North American finding about higher risk of violence against women in common-law relationships as opposed to married women. According to the U.S. and Canadian statistics, twice as many women in common-law relationships report abuse, and up to 6 times more women in common-law relationships become victims in spousal homicides than their married sisters. (Note again that Dobash et al.'s research in the United Kingdom does not support this pattern.) Brownridge seeks the reasons behind these dramatic differences in the selection versus the relationship variables, also acknowledging that these two types of variables may not be orthogonal. Selection variables pertain to the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to choose a common-law arrangement over marriage (e.g., differences between women in common-law relationships and married women in terms of age, SES, prior cohabitation history, and religion). Relationship differences are conceptualized as the outcome of living in more ambiguous relationships for those who are not married, possibly increasing the propensity for proprietary behavior, drinking, and the compensatory dominance of men. Based on his analysis of data from more than 7,000 respondents, Brownridge concludes that both groups are becoming increasingly alike in their characteristics and composition over time, as common-law relationships become more widespread and more normative. However, Brownridge argues, parity between the two groups seems to be a long way off, and the selection biases that are closely associated with high risk will continue to expose women in common-law

relationships to heightened levels of violence. What Brownridge does not highlight is that the common-law relationships are not widespread in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, Brownridge brings us a little closer to understanding a puzzling phenomenon in the United States and Canada.

Joseph Michalski also starts by asking questions about explanatory factors of partner violence, but in contrast to Brownridge, his work ends up supporting the importance of relationship variables. Michalski first reviews the existing theories of violence and accumulated data from official statistics and victimization surveys. He observes that the commonly used risk factors (such as psychological variables or cultural orientations) explain only a small portion of the variation in interpersonal violence among intimates. Instead, Michalski argues, the more robust variables that can account for the variation can be found in the social structures of interpersonal relations. From an extensive review of the literature, he identifies six specific factors: social isolation, integrated networks, inequality, relational distance, centralization of authority, and violent network exposure. From the list, all but the integrated networks have the potential to increase the use of violent strategies among intimates. Michalski's attempt to refocus our attention on interactional aspects and away from the intrapersonal or demographic characteristics (like the selection variables in the Brownridge article) of victims/perpetrators serves as a timely alternative to the current North American preoccupation with risk assessment. However, the six-variable model he proposes is not mutually exclusive from the more traditional demographic risk variables he criticizes, nor are the risk variables anathema to what Michalski identifies as the interactional aspects. Indeed, an in-depth understanding of violence against women, especially at the global level, must be informed by structural, cultural, personal, and relational variables and their complex interactions.

Finally, Randall Kropp's article also deals with risk assessment but at a theoretical level. In Kropp's work, we see the difficulties in risk assessment for at least six fundamental reasons. The difficulties lie in the definitions of risk, which may involve the who, what, where, when, and how of violence. How risk assessment should be conducted, who should do it, and what the role of the victim in these assessments should be further complicate the mat-

ter. As Kropp observes, victims may be quite accurate in assessing danger but not necessarily good in predicting when they are safe. Kropp also laments the lack of standards for who should do risk assessments. Often, professionals are told what to do without being sufficiently trained in how to do it. Moreover, Kropp argues, so far the importance of risk assessment has been in terms of its predictive capability of violence. How assessment of risk should be transformed into preventing violence is in its infancy. The bridge between science and practice needs stronger pillars.

The five articles in this special issue bring into the foreground many new insights and theoretical and methodological developments. They are important contributions to existing knowledge and important tools in identifying paths that need further exploration in the continuing battle to eradicate lethal and nonlethal violence against female intimate partners.

Aysan Sev'er
University of Toronto

Myrna Dawson
University of Guelph

Holly Johnson
Statistics Canada

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