

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND THE CANADIAN GIRL CHILD

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Abstract: The authors argue that because there are no groups of girls or young women that can be considered immune from gender-based or systemic violence, there is a significant need for the inclusion and recognition of the girl child in official policies, programs, and legislation. In their view, a fundamental recognition of the specificities of the gendered nature of violence, particularly as it intersects with age, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation is required. Moreover, the antecedent roots of violence need to be identified, as they provide sites for effective and early intervention. They discuss the social and historical context of the girl child in Canada and follow this analysis with a presentation of the research carried out by the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence and its consequent implications for policy and programming. Finally, the authors append a detailed list of concrete recommendations for policy-makers at all levels of government, as well as for service providers and the media, covering such areas as education, service delivery, and future research.

The occurrence of violence is a significant threat to the health, safety, and well-being of all girls and young women. This assertion holds true regardless of whether girls grow up in loving homes where mutual respect is valued, and where conflict is resolved by peaceful means, or whether they live in homes where interactions are characterized by violence and aggression. The capacity of families to keep their daughters safe and to shield them from violence is limited by the multitude of ways in which violence is condoned and perpetuated in our communities, the media, schools, and society in general. Although violence is experienced differently, and may include physical, social, emotional, and/or sexual dimensions, there are no groups of girls that can be considered to be immune from violence, whether gender-based or systemic.

There is a significant need for the inclusion and recognition of the girl child in official policies, programs, and legislation. A fundamental recognition of the specificities of the gendered nature of violence, particularly as it intersects with age, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation is required. Hence, an understanding of the intersectional and interlocking character of violence should provide the framework for the development of policies, programs, and legislation. More importantly, there is a desperate need to incorporate an analysis of violence that takes into consideration the notion of a continuum of violent attitudes, behaviours, and practices. It is not enough simply to identify violence as occurring in the more extreme situations of murder, rape, and property crimes, or to permit interventions in the form of apprehensions and confinements when girls and young women transgress normative laws or moral boundaries. There are clearly antecedent roots of violence that need to be identified, as they provide sites for effective and early intervention.

During the past decade, a team of community and academic researchers from the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence has examined the situation of the Canadian girl child, with

particular attention to their experience of violence and the differential effects of gender socialization. The goal of this chapter is to identify issues relevant to policy and practice in relation to the safety, health, and well-being of Canadian girls. We begin by discussing the social and historical context of the girl child in Canada. This analysis is followed by a presentation of our research and its implications for policy and programming. A central issue that this chapter addresses is that generic violence-prevention programs, policies, and practices devised for “children and youth” may radically miss the mark for either boys or girls or both, unless they are assiduously gender-sensitive (Pepler, Madsen, Webster, & Levene, 2005). Due to differential socialization practices, primary and secondary prevention and tertiary intervention strategies, policies, and practices must effectively accommodate this major gender divide. Girls and boys require policy and programs that are explicitly and appropriately directed to them if they are to be effective (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001).

A Social and Historical Context of the Girl Child in Canada

Throughout the past three decades, the plight of girls has received growing international attention, beginning in the 1980s when UNICEF adopted the phrase, “the girl child”. In recognition of the oppression of girls as a gendered concern, several organizations followed suit, proclaiming 1990 “The Year of The Girl Child”, and the 1990s as “The Decade of the Girl Child” (Berman, McKenna, Traher Arnold, MacQuarrie, & Taylor, 2000). At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the plight of girl children was highlighted as a significant issue of concern. The focus on girls was subsequently incorporated into the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that was ratified by Canada. The Declaration identifies the following objectives that state parties are expected to achieve elimination of:

1. all forms of discrimination against the girl child;
2. negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls;
3. discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training;
4. discrimination against girls in health and nutrition;
5. the economic exploitation of child labour and protection of young girls at work;
6. the girl child’s awareness of and participation in social, economic, and political life; and
7. protection of the rights of the girl child, and increase of awareness of her needs and potential;
8. strengthening the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child; and eradicating:
9. violence against the girl child (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 1995, paragraphs 259-285).

The impetus for the Declaration came initially from women in developing countries throughout the world. In contrast, researchers, programmers, and policy-makers have largely overlooked the unique vulnerabilities of girls in Canada. In part, this omission may be attributed to a mistaken notion that gender equality has been achieved and that violence directed toward girls is a phenomenon that occurs “elsewhere”. The commonly held perception, both domestically and internationally, that Canada is a leader in the arena of progressive human rights

and egalitarian gender relations, has further contributed to a reluctance to acknowledge the challenges girls face. The net result that strategically serves to obscure gender differences collapses these into the more generic rubric of “children and youth”.

Focusing on children and youth as categories deserving of societal attention is problematic. Firstly, it results in the negation of the compounding effects of the intersection of various forms of oppression. Thus, racism in combination with sexism and classism, or ableism in conjunction with sexual orientation and racism, are rarely treated as interlocking and systemic forms of domination (Razack, 1998). Rather, the tendency historically has been to treat these multiple forms of oppression as mutually exclusive, isolated, and distinct from one another. Secondly, the focus on children and youth strategically obfuscates the reality of gender-based violence and inequality, thereby positioning women as simply bearers and nurturers of children, and girls as future mothers.

The international human rights discourse surrounding the girl child is underpinned by a universal and stereotypical construction that presents her as a victim of backward, oppressive, and highly patriarchal cultures. Typically, the girl child is portrayed as the desperate and reluctant victim of female genital mutilation in Africa; the poverty-stricken child labourer and child bride in India; the child prostitute in Thailand; the undeserving victim of honour killing in the Middle East; the illiterate, uneducated, exploited, and uncared for child in Latin America; or the unwanted girl child in China. More recently, the girl child has entered the popular western imagination in the form of the fleeing, illegal refugee who is in need of protection on the one hand, and who signifies the barbarism of her country of origin on the other hand. All of these images are typically displayed prominently in fundraising initiatives of international aid organizations and in the mass media. The unstated premise is that atrocities inflicted upon girls occur elsewhere – in backward nations outside the realm of the “civilized” west, and more specifically, Canada.

Existing statistics reveal otherwise. Within Canada, the girl child is subjected to a range of violent behaviours, attitudes, and practices. For instance, adolescent wives between the ages of 15 and 19 are three times more likely to be murdered as compared to wives who are older (Rodgers, 1994). Girls are also more likely to be victims of sexual and physical assault by family members than are boys (Statistics Canada, 2000, pp. 31-37). It has been estimated that up to 75% of Aboriginal women under the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse, 50% are under 14, and almost 25% are younger than 7 years of age (Correctional Service of Canada, as cited in McIvor & Nahanee, 1998, p. 65). Child poverty is also a significant concern. The Campaign 2000 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada states that 23.4% of Canadian children live in poverty. Aboriginal children and children from racial minority communities constitute the largest populations facing poverty, at 52.1% and 42.7% respectively. Clearly, the situation of girl children in Canada is far from being equitable or in compliance with the obligations set forth in various international agreements.

As the statistics demonstrate, violence against girls and young women is pervasive and deeply entrenched in Canadian society. Yet, it often goes unnoticed. The masking and erasure of the gendered and racialized nature of violence contributes to a flawed understanding, with enormous ramifications for social policy, programs, and legislation. When violence is

normalized, and when its manifestations are not considered until they have escalated and moved into the realm of institutional control, then potential sites of effective intervention and prevention are lost. This tendency is perhaps best demonstrated by the increased focus on the issue of girls as aggressors, and thus actors of violence (Underwood, 2003). In the current research we have consciously focused on the girl child as the recipient of violence rather than emphasizing the differential ways in which violence expresses itself for girls and boys. Instead we explicate the pervasiveness and manifestation of gendered violence and examine how the girl child both perceives and negotiates the resulting lived reality.

The Problem of Gender Neutrality

Examining girls' lives through a gender lens is critically important for gaining an understanding of the fundamental dynamics of inequality at work. Gender analysis requires simultaneous attention to the lives of women *and* men, girls *and* boys. Although approaches to gender analysis differ, key features include understanding and documenting differences in gender roles, as well as the activities and opportunities available to girls and women (Chesney-Lind, 1997). A critically informed gender analysis does not treat women as a homogeneous group or gender attributes as immutable (Hoskins & Artz, 2004). Rather, it highlights the different societal expectations attached to gender attributes that may themselves vary across race, culture, class, income, and time (Randall & Haskell, 2000).

A critical gender analysis enables the evaluation of potentially differential and discriminatory impacts of government policies and practices on males and females from different backgrounds. This is especially important for interrogating the impact of policies, programs, and legislation that treat everyone the same regardless of gender, race, and/or class. In the context of violence against women and children, gender-neutral descriptions obscure root causes of violence, and leave underlying gender-related dynamics unnamed and invisible. Instead, structured and systemic social problems appear as random, un-patterned, and individualized.

Differential Gender-Based Socialization

From an early age children learn what is expected of them as girls and boys. In many cultures, though not universally, there is a tendency toward socializing girls to adopt nurturing, caregiving roles, and for boys to adopt protector roles. This notion is conveyed through the family, peers, schools, the community, the media, and virtually every other social institution. Typically, boys learn that aggression increases their ability to carry out their desires in the world. Despite some limits on their actions, the overall message is that boys can expect some latitude regarding aggressive behaviours. Girls, by contrast, are more typically encouraged to conform to social imperatives regarding clothing and demeanour to appear more desirable to boys. They are socialized to prioritize personal characteristics in the relationship domain. Girls' internalization of "being nice" is implicated in the array of physical and emotional health problems, including eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, found with disturbing frequency among girls and young women (Jiwani & Brown, 1999). Beale (1994) suggests that friendship cliques for girls are more likely to serve as a defensive, protective strategy through which they are assured a place in the peer group, popularity, and thus power. Aggression is more likely to

manifest itself verbally with same-sex peers (Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004). Boys tend towards more obviously competitive group activities such as team sports.

Girls and boys also learn from a young age their racial identity vis-à-vis the communities in which they reside. The early ethnic nature of identity interlocks with the socializing influences of sexism and classism, or disability and sexuality as the case may be (Jackson, 2004). Power is also established within peer groups. The gender messages revolving around prescribed roles of protector and protected resurface strongly in adolescent dating relationships. Accommodating themselves to sexually-based intimate relationships requires relinquishing some autonomy for both boys and girls, though the balance is not likely to favour the girl child, who is more apt to be socialized towards deference and accommodation to the wants and needs of others.

Toward a Definition of Violence

Violence is explained and understood in diverse ways. Most commonly, violence is thought of in terms of physical actions that result in tangible harm to another. But this conceptualization overlooks an important aspect of violence that has increasingly gained acceptance: Psychological harm is a more insidious form of violence (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Its inclusion permits a more comprehensive and exacting gender analysis of everyday violence. It allows us to understand violence as a mechanism used to distribute and maintain power imbalances in society. These power imbalances are predicated on social relationships that channel oppression, and ultimately serve to sustain a social order based on dominant/submissive roles. Laws, policies, and other formal repositories of entrenched traditions normatively sanction these relationships.

Control is gained by depersonalizing people who are categorized as different or as having less value. Personal traits and aspects of social identity such as gender, race, or class, become tools for identifying this difference. When this control of individuals or social institutions becomes invested in specific groups, members of these groups have greater access to power and privilege. The prestige and status of elite group membership also conveys greater potential to influence marginalized groups.

An important element for understanding how inequality is structurally embedded is to consider how less powerful groups must interact with the dominant group. This shaping of the social arena induces less powerful groups to cooperate with acts that may be harmful to them individually and collectively, but they also internalize valuations of themselves and their communities as inferior. This is the subtlest form of violence in society. It is also seamlessly woven into social and institutional structures and is thus less likely to be penalized, save in situations explicitly resulting in harm.

Everyday violence in the lives of girls and young women takes a myriad of forms, including all manifestations of physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse. In recent decades a new category of abuse, the impact of children witnessing violence (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990), demonstrates that children can be victimized in indirect ways. Further, responses to various forms of violence are gender-specific (Jiwani, 1998). What all of these forms of violence have in common is that they serve to undermine the recipient's sense of self. Reinforcing a sense

of powerlessness that limits functioning in both the private and public realms enhances this corrosive effect. Violence reflects an abuse of a power relationship, which for children, often stems from their age and size relative to the perpetrator, and for girls, stems from the combined vulnerabilities of age, gender, and social situation.

Our definition of violence recognizes the hierarchical nature of Canadian society. It is grounded in the findings of the first phase of our national project on violence prevention for the girl child (Jiwani & Brown, 1999). In essence, this definition highlights the power imbalances that lead to violence and is predicated on conceptualizing violence as spanning a continuum of attitudes, beliefs, and actions (see also Kelly, 1998). Thus, violence is:

...the construction of difference and otherness; it entails inferiorizing or devaluing the "Other." Violence is further understood as the mechanism by which individuals or groups vie for, and/or sustain, a position of power in hierarchical structures defined by patriarchal values (as defined at the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence meeting, Winnipeg, 2001, as cited in Berman & Jiwani, 2002, p. 4).

The Current Research

In recognition of the reality that girls in Canada routinely encounter subtle and explicit forms of violence, researchers from the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence undertook a national research study. One purpose of this project was to interrogate and challenge the binary construction which positions the West as a superior, altruistic, and progressive entity. By examining the situation of the girl child in Canada, we have deconstructed the universality of the categories of "children and youth". Moreover, we have challenged the denial and trivialization of gender-based violence as it affects and influences the safety and well-being of Canadian girls and young women. Our investigation sought to demonstrate that "the third world" exists in the so-called "first world" (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Mohanty, 1991).

Other objectives of this study were: to explicate the diverse ways in which girls are socialized to expect violence in their lives; to examine how social policies, legislation, and institutions alleviate, or perpetuate, the problems faced by this population; to explore dimensions and manifestations of the intersections between systemic forms of violence, such as racism and sexism, and violence occurring within intimate/familial relationships; and lastly, to propose constructive, meaningful strategies for implementing policy and programming changes geared to prevent gendered violence and to promote egalitarian interactions in the lives of girls.

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

The theoretical and methodological perspectives derived from the principles of feminist theory and participatory action research guided the conceptualization and implementation of this project. Assumptions upon which this work are based include: that girls and young women are socialized to expect violence in their everyday lives; that, as a result of their socialization, violence becomes "normalized" for girls; that violence occurs

in both subtle and explicit ways including psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual; and that girls from all socio-economic, racial, geographic, and cultural groups are affected by the multiple forms of violence, and experience it differently. Implicit in these assumptions, given the pervasive and insidious nature of many forms of violence, all girls are considered to be vulnerable and “at risk” when addressing the topic of violence.

During the first phase of this research, each of the five Centres carried out parallel research activities in our own communities. More specifically, we compiled an inventory of existing programs and services available to girls and young women, reviewed the literature on specific issues pertaining to violence, and lastly, conducted focus groups with service providers as well as girls and young women across the country. Overall findings from the first phase of the study revealed that girls are rarely considered to merit special attention. Rather, girls are treated monolithically, and tend to be collapsed within the gender-neutral category of “children and youth”. Additional findings revealed that: (a) There are few violence prevention initiatives in place; (b) existing initiatives are underfunded, sporadic, and intermittent; (c) there is a lack of program coordination and integration with existing services; (d) very few programs are gender-specific despite the need and demonstrated success of such programs; and, (e) the dichotomy between violence prevention and intervention is illusory.

One consequence of this dualistic assumption, however, is that there is rarely sufficient money for intervention and, at best, sporadic funding for prevention. While effective programs need to be gender-specific to address the differential outcomes of violence for girls and boys, the quality and quantity of regional programs designed to address violence in the lives of girls is relatively inconsistent. With the possible exception of Québec, effective programs are scarce and, for the most part, deal with the issue of violence in a gender-neutral manner. The differential gender role socialization of girls and boys needs to be recognized and used as a point of departure for the development of policies, programs, and legislation (Jiwani, 1998).

During the second phase of this project, each of the Centres studied a particular aspect or manifestation of gender-based violence in the lives of girls and/or programmatic aspects of violence prevention, legislation, and policies. This approach was consistent with our collaborative practice and was also sensitive to regional needs.

The Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children in London, Ontario, focused on the sexual harassment of girls and young women. The British Columbia/Yukon FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children examined issues contributing to the vulnerabilities of immigrant and refugee girls from racialized communities and the policies that influence their access to services and sense of belonging. The RESOLVE Tri-Provincial Network (Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan) focused on the sexual exploitation of girls and the policies and programs impacting on them. The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Research on Family Violence (New Brunswick) and the Centre de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur la Violence Familiale et la Violence Faite aux Femmes (CRI-VIFF) in Québec, each focused on programmatic aspects of violence prevention and the promotion of egalitarian interactions between genders, and in relation to the girl child. CRI-VIFF undertook an evaluation of the factors that contribute to the diffusion and implementation of effective anti-violence programs, while the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre focused on

examples of successful interventions that highlighted the relative merits and limitations of gender-separate versus gender-integrated anti-violence programs.

Research Methodology

From a feminist perspective, knowledge is not something that is produced in a vacuum by a sort of “pure” intellectual process. Instead, knowledge is value-laden and shaped by historical, social, political, gender, and economic conditions (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, & Campbell, 1998; Habermas, 1971; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ideologies, taken-for-granted assumptions, and values that usually remain hidden and unquestioned, create a social structure that serves to oppress particular groups by limiting available options.

Principles underlying feminist research (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987) that inform this study are: (a) The research process is based on valuing the experiences of girls and young women from their own perspective, and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes; (b) the inclusion of a diversity of girls’ and women’s experiences; (c) reflexivity in the research process, allowing both investigators and participants the opportunity to reflect on the content and process of the study and to share these reflections through dialogue; and d) knowledge produced by the research has the potential to foster change in the participants, in the community, or both. The notion of research as praxis, or the combination of research and action, is a basic tenet. A critical/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.

The present research is framed within this paradigm, with particular reference to the tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR). However, the emphasis on PAR varied among the Centres and was contingent upon the specificity of the topic of investigation and the contextual factors operative in each of the different regions: Some centres concentrated their efforts on the analysis of specific policies and legislation, while others focused on evaluating programs, and still others combined policy and narrative analysis based on the lived realities of girls and young women. Similarly, the levels of analysis differed depending on the nature and subject of the investigation: Some centres framed their investigations with particular reference to international policies and obligations, while others focused on provincial legislation and local policies.

Findings

The results of these investigations demonstrate that violence operates at numerous levels spanning the continuum from individual lived realities to systemic institutional structures. Further, violence is discursively represented in strategic omissions and gender-neutral perspectives embedded in policies, programs, and legislation. Although a detailed presentation of the findings from each Centre is beyond the scope of this chapter, we present some of the overarching theoretical, programmatic, and policy considerations below.

Doing Research From the Ground Up

Employing a PAR approach led to privileging the voices and experiences of girls and young women. Their experiences inform our understanding of the ways in which policies and legislation, wittingly and unwittingly, shape their lives. Their stories poignantly communicate the erosion of self that is an outcome of violence, whether that violence is orchestrated in a series of daily acts or instigated in a single horrific incident. Moreover, their stories tell us about the absence of any kind of effective recourse. Thus, for girls who experience everyday sexual harassment or everyday racism, or a combination thereof, there are few places to turn to for assistance and support. This is not to imply that these girls are simply “victims”. On the contrary, their experiences reveal a form of agency that is both highly creative and self-sustaining. Nevertheless, institutions need to support these efforts, for example, by providing “safe spaces” and being vigilant about the differential impact of policies and programs. Failure to do so results in the normalization and embeddedness of these forms of violence.

The gendered nature of socialization suggests the ways in which social institutions (e.g., schools, family, laws, and media) produce and reproduce the girl child. A common concern articulated by the girls in our research dealt with the nature of “fitting in”. Implicit in this concern was a normatively grounded acceptance of what they were fitting in to. Most commonly, taken-for-granted knowledge referred to internalized standards of femininity, and conformity. It is apparent that fitting into something requires prior knowledge of it; dominant institutions in society transmit such knowledge both subtly and explicitly, begging the question of whose interests are served by the perpetuation of these complex interwoven forms of oppression. Keeping girls in their place maintains the existing power and privilege hierarchies, entrenching and perpetuating the patriarchal order most overtly recognizable in dominant structures of power. Gender, as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) among others have noted, is used to signify boundaries between groups. Gender also becomes a contested site of multiple discourses regarding sexuality, ethnic group membership, and traditionalism versus modernism/westernization discourses (Handa, 1997).

For effective change to occur, it is imperative that institutional sites for intervention be defined and appropriate resources be harnessed toward implementation. Factors that influence the identity formation of girls as girls, as racialized and sexualized “others”, and as disabled, need to be understood and recognized as critical points of departure for the development of equitable policies and programs. Basic needs such as food, shelter, and protection from violence constitute fundamental rights for all girls. As structural needs, they are key to identity formation. Similarly, peer group and family supports are integral to the development of a positive and healthy identity. They contribute to a sense of belonging that, in turn, reduces alienation and marginalization. Yet, as our current research demonstrates, these fundamental human rights and supports are not always available to the Canadian girl child.

Gender-Neutral Policies and Legislation

Canada is a signatory to many international conventions, accords, declarations, and protocols. While many of these differ, they share a common commitment to the protection of human rights and the enjoyment of civil liberties. Our analysis reveals a significant disparity

between these commitments as articulated in the international arena and the lived reality of Canadian girls and young women.

The commitment toward gathering gender-specific data remains of significant concern despite international obligations. While there have been progressive attempts to gather such data, only in rare situations are such data utilized for social policy formation. For example, available statistics clearly demonstrate the heightened risk and vulnerability of Aboriginal girls. The study conducted by the RESOLVE Tri-Provincial Network, and reported by Ursel (2001, 2006), further demonstrates the factors that contribute to their marginalization and sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, current legislation and policies have failed to factor this reality into programs and policies. Similarly, while there is a paucity of information relating specifically to immigrant and refugee girls, there is nonetheless widespread recognition at the international level and among researchers regarding the heightened vulnerability of this population. Yet again, existing policies and programs do not reflect this recognition, nor do they embrace an intersectional analysis of the multiple forms of oppression that impact on the lives of these girls and young women. Further, it had been established that gender-sensitive violence prevention programming is necessary, but few such programs have been developed or monitored for efficacy. Significant exceptions are located in Ontario and in New Brunswick (Cameron, 2004).

In part, this failure to address the specificities and risk factors shaping the lives of Canadian girls is rooted in a current climate of backlash. Within this context, it is “safer” to collapse gender, race, and class differences within the categories of “children” and “youth”. Under the guise of “the best interests of the child”, federal, provincial, and territorial governments (albeit not uniformly) embrace legislation and policies that seemingly protect *all* children. While this appears to be in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the focus on the girl child, as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, is rarely incorporated into policies and legislation. One exception appears to be Québec where the political climate surrounding the issues of youth protection laws, sexual aggression, dating violence, and children who witness violence, has resulted in a policy environment that more explicitly recognizes the differential impact of violence on girls and boys. Nevertheless, the specific needs of the girl child are consistently omitted in Canada’s federal, provincial, and municipal policies and programs. Instead, part of the discourse of backlash seems to be an emphasis on the supposed gender equality of girls and boys, women and men. This has resulted in a preoccupation with the supposed increase in aggression of girls. In this respect, girls are seen to have achieved gender parity in the realm of their potential to participate in violence.

However, despite the seemingly benevolent intentions of protecting children, it is interesting to note the sentiments and rationale underpinning some of the existing policies and legislation. The research conducted by the RESOLVE Centre addressed the issue of prostitution and the sexual exploitation of girls and young women. This research also analyzed the impact of the Secure Care Act (British Columbia) and the Protection of Children In Prostitution (PCHIP) (Alberta). As the RESOLVE research indicates, governments seem to be most committed to protecting these rights in those instances where interventions are mandated by the criminal justice system; in other words, where laws have been broken. Where interventions seem to be most preventive or appropriate, but where no legal infractions have occurred, then these

interventions rest largely on the shoulders of underfunded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups:

From a policy perspective there is a conundrum: The category of children most in need of services are [sic] for the most part children “on the run” from “controlling” agencies, which are the agencies most securely funded to provide the services. Thus the evolution of securely funded programs with a mandate to protect child sexual abuse victims may have the unintended effect of frightening these children/youth away because of their fear of, or aversion to the “control” components of these services (Busby et al., 2002, p. 108).

This pattern is particularly apparent in the subtle, yet pervasive, effects of sexual harassment. This issue was the focus of the research conducted by the Centre in London, Ontario (Berman, Straatman, Hunt, Izumi, & MacQuarrie, 2002). A key finding from this research was the inefficacy of current policies in dealing with the continuum of everyday violence and the limitations of prevailing gender-neutral programming and policies. As the Ontario Centre’s research amply demonstrated, sexual harassment is supported and sustained in a multitude of ways, with long-term deleterious physical and emotional effects that include – but are not limited to – eating disorders, suicidal ideation, marginalization, and addictions. The loss of self that is an outcome of the constant and insidious forms of sexual harassment, often labelled as teasing and bullying, is profound. While most schools and communities have various “zero tolerance” policies intended to deal with these subtle forms of violence, these policies tend to embrace a gender-neutral and minimizing perspective. Issues regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are negated and/or trivialized. Nevertheless, in the context of scarce programming, these services provide a limited and needed form of intervention. However, they are underfunded, heavily reliant on volunteer labour, and sporadic.

A similar trend is evident in the research conducted by the British Columbia/Yukon FREDA Centre where the research focus was on gender racialization, with particular emphasis on racism as a form of violence. The FREDA Centre’s research, framed within the context of international, national, and provincial policies affecting the girl child, highlighted a multitude of inadequacies and program and policy inconsistencies. An important contribution of the FREDA Centre’s research was an articulation of definitions of violence as understood by young women and girls of colour from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Of particular note is their identification of racism as the principal form of violence they encounter: Intimate forms of violence, such as sexism and classism, were background structural issues simply taken for granted. Anti-violence school policies often do not deal with racism. Rather, racism is simply articulated in the school context as anti-tolerance to multiculturalism. The latter is most obviously manifested and celebrated as an appreciation of cultural differences, provided these differences do not spill over the confines of safe topics such as food, dress, and dance.

As per the critique of policies and legislation articulated in the research conducted by the RESOLVE Tri-Provincial Network and the British Columbia/Yukon FREDA Centre, the gaps between existing policies, legislation, and programs versus the international obligations ratified by Canada, offer glaring examples of inequities, and highlight the disjuncture between rhetoric

and reality (Cameron, 2001). Such disjuncture is most obvious in areas of legislation that potentially violate the Charter rights of the girl child.

Programmatic Considerations

The disparity between publicly, internationally stated commitments and the actual reality of girls and young women in Canada is highly surprising in one sense given the extensive groundwork conducted by community organizations, advocates, and researchers dealing with gender-based violence over the last few decades. As the research of Centre de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur la Violence Familiale et la Violence Faite aux Femmes (CRI-VIFF) and the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre reveals, there are numerous and frequently irreconcilable factors involved in the adoption and implementation of effective gender-based anti-violence programs. Critical amongst these are issues of core funding, political commitment, and the involvement of all stakeholders.

The linkage model identified by CRI-VIFF is highly congruent with the participatory action research paradigm used by our Centres, as well as by organizations worldwide. Strategies to insure safe spaces for girls to engage in their own violence prevention initiatives were suggested as well by the research of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Research Center in New Brunswick (Cameron, Normandeau, & McKay, 2003). Further, as the RESOLVE Tri-Provincial Network's research reveals, communities most affected by an issue are more likely to utilize programs and services that are perceived to be less coercive and more flexible. The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre's contribution also underscores the necessity of involving communities in the planning and implementation of successful programs (Cameron & Creating Peaceful Learning Environments Team, 2002). More pertinently, the New Brunswick Centre's research demonstrates the imperatives of conducting both gender-specific and gender-integrated programming, provided these are done with the full recognition of the gendered nature of violence and the unique concerns influencing girls and young women (Cameron, 2004). Despite such positive evidence, the PAR paradigm, with its emphasis on the involvement and mobilization of community partners, has tended to be accorded little legitimacy within the dominant research, funding, and policy-making spheres. It is refreshing, however, to notice a growing acceptance of this approach, especially within government.

Conclusion

The Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence is currently engaged in an intensive process of dissemination of our research findings. This process includes dialogue, discussion, and analysis with our community partners and relevant stakeholders regarding the recommendations developed. Regional roundtables, invitational conferences, and community forums have been held across Canada and in Ottawa. Consistent with the participatory nature of this research, the dissemination strategies include sharing and discussing what we have learned with those who are most directly affected, namely the girls and young women who have so generously and poignantly shared their stories, their fears, their hopes, and their dreams for violence-free lives.

While each Centre has focused on a different aspect of violence in girls' lives, they collectively and conclusively represent the current shortcomings of policies and programs pertaining to the lives of girls and young women who are differently situated. More specifically, this research reveals the urgent need to provide solidly funded programs and services to ameliorate the condition of girls, and to fulfill the societal obligation of protecting them from violence. Awareness, then, of the different faces and compounding effects of interlocking and intersecting forms of violence must be the point of departure for any further investigation, policy formation, and program implementation. We clearly cannot wait until the violence that exists escalates into lethal forms before intervention is made possible or mandated.

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Appendix

Introduction to Recommendations

The recommendations we present here are a “work in progress”. Some of these are targeted to particular ministries or sectors of society. Others are more general in nature. While we acknowledge that some of our recommendations are already being enacted at the local, provincial, or federal level, most are not. Collectively, they reflect our shared vision of what we hope, and believe, is possible.

The most far-reaching recommendation we make concerns the need for the inclusion and recognition of the girl child in official policies, programs, and legislation. The implementation of this recommendation requires a fundamental recognition of the specificities of the gendered nature of violence, particularly as it intersects with age, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation. Hence, an understanding of the intersectional and interlocking character of violence should provide the framework for the development of policies, programs, and legislation. More importantly, there is a desperate need to incorporate an analysis of violence that takes into consideration the notion of a continuum of violent attitudes, behaviours, and practices. It is not enough to simply identify violence as occurring in the more extreme situations of murder, rape, and property crimes, or to permit interventions in the form of apprehensions and confinements when girls and young women transgress normative laws or moral boundaries. There are clearly antecedent roots of violence that need to be identified, as they provide sites for effective and early intervention. The following recommendations outline the necessity for supporting, through funding and legitimacy, ground-up, community-based and community-driven programs and initiatives that are clearly tailored toward prevention and intervention. Our recommendations reflect what we believe is necessary for the reduction and elimination of violence in the lives of girls and the promotion of egalitarian interactions between genders. The interventions we propose should occur in situations of normalized and subtle forms of violence, as well as in its more extreme manifestations.

General Recommendations

- That the gendered nature of violence be fully recognized with awareness of the multiple ways in which violence manifests and impacts on the lives of girls and young women.
- That the legitimate status of the girl child be recognized and named in the public realm, and that the social obligations which arise from her gendered experiences of violence be clearly stated.
- That additional funding resources that reach out to the girl child be provided rather than waiting for her to overcome internal and external obstacles to reach out to the system.
 - Not all forms of violence land on the radar screen of the criminal justice system. Nor is it typical for the girl child to reach out to parents, teachers, or even the health care system unless encountering more extreme forms of violence.
- That programs and policies provide emotional, cognitive, and physical spaces that enable the girl child to engage in healthy relationships and give voice to the full range of her thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

- That the context of sexuality and attitudes about male and female roles generally, as well as the societal conceptualization and sexualization of youth, be acknowledged as contributing factors to violence and sexual exploitation.

Recommendations for Governments

- That the federal, provincial, and territorial governments cooperate to implement working groups comprising front line service providers, researchers, advocates, policy-makers, and legislators. These working groups should also be mandated to monitor compliance and work toward the harmonization of domestic policies and legislation so that they are in alignment with Canada’s international obligations.
- That the constitutional divide between federal ratification and provincial implementation of treaties be eliminated. The first step is to emphasize that this division is a violation of the spirit of the treaties, and include this information in all research which deals with international human rights instruments.
- That popular education tools about women’s equality rights and international human rights instruments be developed and disseminated for groups seeking equality on behalf of women and girls.
- That the federal government play a direct role in promoting secure funding for national and local NGOs by utilizing their 3-year pilot project funds to lever a greater commitment on the part of provincial governments toward the maintenance of services demonstrated to be effective.
 - And that the federal government fund studies required to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs.
- That governments sponsor national and regional workshops and conferences to assist service providers to share and develop best practices in the field.
- That governments critically evaluate and amend legislation such as the provision to obtain parental/guardian consent for minors to access services and assistance.
- That governments allocate a percentage of their “housing for the homeless” funds specifically to street youth and children and youth at risk for involvement in prostitution.
 - Shelter services and safe homes are desperately needed in many communities.
- That governments allocate enriched funding for employment readiness and employment training courses for children and youth exploited through prostitution, immigrant and refugee youth, and those marginalized by virtue of disability, sexuality, and class.
- That governments provide additional funding and support to immigrant and refugee girls and their families.
- That governments implement their commitment to publicize and communicate to the Canadian people the nature and extent of their international obligations.
 - These obligations should be contextualized within the current framework of federal, provincial, and territorial responsibilities.
- That governments provide basic services such as food, shelter, clothing, and safety for girls and young women who have experienced violence or who are at risk of experiencing such violence.

- That governments provide stable and adequate funding to community organizations to facilitate the provision of such basic necessities as food, shelter, clothing, and, above all, safety to girls and young women.
- That governments establish secure funding for organizations that cater specifically to the wide-ranging needs of girls and young women.
 - That funding for such organizations not be vulnerable to the “political winds of change”.
- That there be improved methods of consultation with governments about Canada’s international positions.
- That NGOs be supported to develop and disseminate evaluation tools (such as shadow reports and report cards) to be submitted to government and the United Nations during Canada’s reporting periods.
- That international human rights law and norms be used to interpret the Charter and other domestic laws in domestic equality litigation. This should include the Conventions themselves, General Recommendations of relevant Committees, Concluding Remarks of relevant Committees on Canada’s reports under Conventions, and any documented discussion on Canada’s reports between Canada and the relevant Committee.

Recommendations for Research

- That governments promote and fund research that specifically outlines the health sequelae of different forms of violence.
 - This includes research that focuses on the impact of systemic forms of violence such as racism, ableism, sexuality, and experiences of marginalization.
- That governments promote and fund gender-based research that centres the voices of girls, and their interaction with adult caregivers and service providers.
- That research funded by governments embody a critical anti-racist perspective in keeping with the intent of such international instruments as the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- That research be conducted in a feminist participatory action framework and research partners make every effort to disseminate the results in a community-friendly fashion which simultaneously inspires community action.
- That non-traditional forms of research be encouraged, particularly those that involve girls and young women as full partners in all phases of the research process.
 - Priority should be placed on those projects that include girls and young women from diverse and marginalized communities.
- That community organizations be encouraged and provided full recognition and compensation for their partnership in all phases of the research process.
- That qualitative research be encouraged to examine the impact of specific legislation and programs on the immigrant and refugee girl child.

Recommendations for Education

- That adequate funding be provided for the development, assessment, and dissemination of effective violence prevention and intervention programs and strategies.

- In recognition of the intersectionality of gendered violence and racism, such programs and strategies should be required to incorporate an anti-racism, anti-oppression framework.
- That violence prevention/intervention programs be fully institutionalized in schools by incorporating them into the mandates of various provincial ministries of education and by integrating them into the curricula as compulsory components.
 - That funding for such prevention/intervention programs include compensation for a coordinator/facilitator.
- That schools be supported to implement and evaluate phases of violence prevention/intervention programming so as to ensure their continual refinement and effectiveness.
- That school curricula reflect culturally diverse perspectives and information and that these be framed within an anti-racism paradigm.
- That testing methods used within schools be free of cultural and gender bias.
- That the participation of all girls, and most especially marginalized girls, be encouraged in work co-op programs, mentoring, and curriculum development.
- That teacher training and education about racism, and its fundamental link with the perpetuation of gendered violence, be required.
 - Such training extends to an awareness and appreciation of the potentially deleterious effects of discrimination on academic performance and general behaviour.
- That the development and sustainability of peer mentoring programs for immigrant/refugee girls from racialized communities be fostered.
- That training to school personnel be provided in order for them to be able to respond to everyday instances of racism and sexism.
- That school counsellors be trained within an anti-racism paradigm so that their services are not merely cultural prescriptions but are based on a recognition of unequal power relations and social hierarchies extant in society.
- That media literacy courses be made a mandatory component of school curricula and that initiatives toward this end be encouraged and funded within the non-profit sector and the private sector of media organizations.
 - That such initiatives enable girls and young women, especially those from racialized communities, to tell their own stories.
- That girls and young women be taught strategies to challenge and change harmful behaviour that they encounter, and that such knowledge be a critical component of any initiative. These strategies will focus on individually and collectively empowering girls and young women, while simultaneously eliminating any structural propensity for victim blaming. Such knowledge will be a critical component of any initiative.
- That Canadians be educated on the extreme poverty levels of immigrant and refugee families and visible minority groups generally. That such education emphasize that this is the product of international and domestic institutionalized racism.
- That immigrant and refugee and visible minority youth be educated on their rights under the various provincial and the federal Human Rights Acts. It is imperative that these youth be equipped to recognize when racism is a factor in hiring, and use their legislated recourse to address the wrongdoing.

- That schools develop comprehensive strategies to increase awareness of human rights, especially children's rights.

Recommendations For Health Service Providers

- That health professionals fully recognize violence as a critical determinant of health.
 - That health services respond to the many and varied effects of the entire spectrum of violence.
- That health care providers recognize that the multitude of health problems experienced by girls are often the result of exposure to, and experiences of, violence.
- That health care providers be educated to elicit and respond to the particular vulnerabilities of girls and young women.
- That there be provision for more generalized health services for sexually exploited girls and young women as the health impacts of violence are often ill-defined.
- That health care service providers receive training and education regarding the impacts of marginalization and the pernicious effects of subtle and systemic forms of violence.
- That "one stop" health care facilities which provide a variety of services addressing different health issues for girls and young women be established with their full participation.
- That consent requirements be waived in situations where they might impede the delivery of, and access to, health care services for girls and young women.
- That mandatory reporting requirements not interfere with access to health services for young women and girls who are experiencing violence.
- That violence and gender inequality be included as integral topics of education and communication in all health prevention and promotion initiatives.
- That there be a consistent delivery of health care services to all marginalized girls and young women and that this be predicated on principles of universal access without regard to the official status or age of this population.

Recommendations for Media

- That a serious attempt be made to reflect a more representative portrayal of racialized communities and perspectives in the Canadian mass media, as per Canada's international obligations, domestic policies, and legislation.
- That educational, consciousness-raising manuals, videos, CD-ROMs, and other forms of programming and educational material be developed and be accessible to teachers, employers, and those who are interacting with girls and young women.
- That girls and young women be involved in the production and dissemination of their own forms of media, and that the relevant agencies be encouraged to distribute work that reflects their concerns and realities.
- That governments at all levels be encouraged to meet our obligations under international law regarding children's exposure to harmful media content.

Recommendations for Programs and Service Delivery

- That immigrant settlement services be provided with funding to hire cultural liaison workers and additional services for settlement in order to reduce the isolation of girls and their families.
- That counsellors and others who are familiar with different cultural traditions be hired within schools and service organizations.
 - That such counsellors be trained within an anti-racism paradigm so that their services are not merely cultural.
- That substance abuse/addiction be formally recognized as a co-determinant with other forms of violence, and most especially sexual exploitation.
- That services aimed at the prevention of violence in the lives of girls be responsive to those less visible and more subtle, yet nevertheless real, needs of girls and young women who have experienced violence in its many forms.
 - That such services take advantage of the window of opportunity that opens up when girls seek out voluntary services on their own initiative rather than being coerced to participate in the latter as a result of state intervention.
- That securely funded programs with a mandate to provide services to girls exposed to violence be required not to exert a control and coercive orientation.
 - That such programs have a voluntary character that facilitates choice on the part of girls and young women.
- That generic and specialized services for girls who have experienced violence be available and accessible.
 - That services be designed to respond to the range of outcomes corresponding to the continuum of violence.
- That girls be given safe gender-segregated opportunities to discuss violence in their lives.
- That interventions be developed that capture the positive attention of boys who can be negatively affected by programming that is not appropriate to their stage of awareness.
- That the girl child be taught strategies of healthy resistance.
 - That health-seeking behaviours which represent resistance to oppressive circumstances be redefined as indicators of physical and emotional well-being.
- That a feminist process evaluation of the programs that are currently in place, and those being initiated, be encouraged.
- That economically restricted rural and isolated communities be assisted to develop human and other resources necessary to implement action and change.