



*"Building the smallest democracies at the heart of society."
The United Nations: The International Year of the Family, 1994*

Agreement# 40063171

Mothers and Infants Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence



by Nicole Letourneau

Children exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) have been found to experience severe after effects, including emotional and behavioural problems and social and cognitive problems. However, some children from families with IPV develop well or are "resilient" in spite of this risk, creating the impetus for an increased understanding of ways to support the healthy development of children exposed to IPV. Given that some mothers of preschool-age children exposed to IPV may be more sensitive and responsive to their children than other mothers, and the early mother-child relationship is known to be a potent predictor of children's developmental outcomes, the early mother-child relationship may be an important protective factor for children in families affected by IPV.

Hughes and Luke* suggest that the mother-infant relationship may moderate the impacts of IPV on development. Indeed, one of the most potent predictors of children's developmental success is their relationship or interaction with a parent (usually the mother). Optimal mother-infant interactions are characterized by parental sensitivity to infant needs, responsiveness, social-emotional growth fostering, and cognitive growth fostering activities. In this study, we wanted to know how mothers exposed to violence interact with their infants. Do they compensate or does the violence spillover to affect their relationships with their infants?

Methods

This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample consisted of 51 mother-infant pairs from Atlantic Canada who reported experience

of violence consistent with the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) criteria. Mothers reported living with a violent partner when they had an infant under the age of 12 months and that they were no longer in the violent relationship or that they were in the relationship, but currently accessed services for IPV. The average age of the children was just under 24 months while the average age of mothers was approximately 29 years. The length of children's exposure to IPV ranged from one to 30 months.

During qualitative semi-structured interviews, mothers were asked to describe their experience parenting their child while in a violent relationship, and how they believed it affected their parenting, their child, and themselves. Mother-child relationship quality was assessed using the *Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale* (NCATS), which is a video observational measure. The NCATS is the most widely used measure of mother-child interaction, and provides a binary measure of 73 behavioural items that assess the presence of sensitivity and responsiveness in relationships with higher scores representing more optimal mother-infant interactions. Specific NCATS subscales examine

Mothers and Infants Exposed... cont'd on page 6

Inside this issue ...

2. WISH Inc. Celebrates 25 Years of Helping Women and Their Children
3. RESOLVE Manitoba Update
4. RESOLVE Saskatchewan Update
5. RESOLVE Alberta Update
6. Mothers and Infants..., *cont't.*
7. Announcements, Conferences & Events
8. Prairieaction Update

WISH Inc. (Women in Second Stage Housing) Celebrates 25 Years of Helping Women and Their Children Build Better Tomorrows



by Lori Rudniski, Executive Director, WISH Inc.

SAFETY, COURAGE, STRENGTH



At WISH Inc., *Safety, Courage, and Strength* are more than just words—these are the actions that have guided our work for over 25 years, and continue to be our solid foundation as we move towards the future. From the very beginning, when a group of inspiring people in the community and government saw a need, we have seen this courage in action. Building on the success of short term emergency shelters, these pioneers set out to provide safe housing and longer-term support for the women and their children who attempt to make concrete changes in their lives. These women and children needed support and a place to live so as to not to return to a home filled with violence and harm. In 1986, WISH Inc. opened its doors as the first second-stage program in Manitoba.

Since then, we see this strength everyday in the women we serve, from their initial decision to come to the WISH Program through to their graduation day that celebrates their year of success and growth, and beyond.

These are the courageous women who have made the difficult choice to leave their home and seek safety and help for themselves and their children. They are in their 20's 30's 40's and beyond. Their

children may be babies, toddlers, school age and teenagers. These are the women who know there is a life free from violence for themselves and their children but need help to turn their hope into reality. They know that even though they may leave with little, except what they can carry with them, they are determined to build a better life free from abuse. They want their children to be safe, happy, and free from fear. For many, they are breaking the cycle of violence that they, too, had to experience when they were children.

Throughout the years, we have had the honour of seeing these families standing taller and walking prouder as they feel safer and more confident in their new life free from violence. Although many of the challenges of building a new life may continue, these women and their children can meet these hurdles with a stronger belief in themselves, and their strength of skills and knowledge.

Looking forward to the next 25 years, we know

that our agency will continue to grow and expand to meet the needs of the women and children we serve. The work continues, but the safety, courage, and strength of all perseveres in building great tomorrows!

To find out more about WISH Inc. (Women in Second Stage Housing), please check out our website at wishinc.ca, e-mail us at wishinc@mymts.net, or call our office at **204-275-2600**. ☘



*On September 27, 2012, over 240 friends of WISH Inc. heard the amazing talents of Manitoba's own **Sierra Noble**, the clever wit of emcee **Jon Ljunberg**, and celebrated over 25 years of helping women and their children break free from violence.*

Manitoba Update



by Jane Ursel

New Projects

RESOLVE continues its work on issues of trauma with **Klinic Community Health Centre** through a project entitled *Developing an Online Trauma Informed Training Workshop: A Formative Evaluation*. Based on funding from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Klinic will develop an online version of their trauma-informed workshop. RESOLVE will help in this process by contacting previous workshop participants and asking them for feedback on the workshop, and their views and suggestions for transferring it to an online format. Feedback will be obtained through brief questionnaires e-mailed to participants, and phone interviews with selected participants. The project will conclude in Spring 2013.



Information Sharing

Communicating our research results is a high priority for RESOLVE. In addition to our books and published articles, attending conferences and presenting papers is an excellent means of sharing our results with practitioners in the field. This Fall, RESOLVE staff and students have been busy presenting data from several of our studies at conferences in Western Canada. **Jane Ursel** presented findings from the **Healing Journey** study on the *The Costs of Abuse and the Promise of Intervention* at the RESOLVE Research Day in Regina. Preliminary results show that women who can leave abusive relationships are much more likely to pursue education and employment than women who still cope with abuse. **Jocelyn Proulx** and our community partner, **Suhad Bisharat** (Laurel Centre), presented results from their study of men sexually abused as children *Of Myths and Men: Suppressing Disclosures of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. They generously offered to send their

extensive bibliography to anyone who made a request. If you are interested, contact Jocelyn at proulxjb@ad.umanitoba.ca.

On November 7, Jane Ursel, **Cheryl Fraehlich** and **Marta Krygier** attended the *National Research Day* in Vancouver. The theme of this conference was *Sexual Violence, Domestic Violence: Exploring the Continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls*. Cheryl presented a paper with data from the Winnipeg Family Violence Court entitled *Seeking Justice: Issues of Race and Gender in a Specialized Family Violence Court*. Jane and Marta presented a paper on child sexual abuse cases heard in the Winnipeg Family Violence Court. Jane also presented a paper on the two different

types of information RESOLVE collects—one from institutional sources, for example police and court documents, and another type of information we receive from women's own stories of their abuse and help seeking behaviour. She suggested that these mixed methodologies provide a rich source of information, and combining the two sources of data fill gaps and enrich our understanding of the dynamics of abuse and the process of intervention.

Communicating our research results is always an important issue for academics and service providers alike. However, content analysis of public media indicates that women's voices are seriously underrepresented in newspaper articles and the electronic media. In December 2012, RESOLVE Manitoba and the University of Manitoba sponsor two workshops for academic women and one workshop for service providers to increase women's voices in public discourse. ❧

Saskatchewan Update



by Mary Hampton, Ann Bishop, and Eric Oleson

Another successful research day was put on in Regina, Saskatchewan. **Ann Bishop**, Conference coordinator, did a wonderful job making sure all came off without a hitch. Pictures are thanks to **Eric Oleson**, our resident creative genius.

We opened the conference with the Dessert Social on the evening of Thursday, October 18. This event gave us a chance to hear from those who brought greetings from various sectors, including the Saskatchewan government, Prairieaction Foundation, University of Regina, and Luther College.



The Honourable
Dr. Lillian Dyck

Our guiding Elder, **Betty McKenna**, opened the conference with a traditional prayer. **The Honourable Dr. Lillian Dyck** (member of the Senate of Canada from Saskatchewan), gave the opening keynote address. Dr. Dyck is an Aboriginal scientist who always attends our events and is very supportive of our work. She spoke very movingly about being harassed as an academic,

and her healing to rise as a Canadian senator. Professor **Sarah Abbott** shared her film entitled *This Time Last Winter* at the lunch session.

Professor Abbott has received the Lieutenant Governor's Arts Award as a result of her innovative teaching and work. She brings her productions to the community so that we can involve all in healing from experiences of abuse and violence. She hosted a question and answer session following the film to answer questions about this anti-violence work.



Sarah Abbott

A unique feature in our conference was the healing room, hosted by Elder Betty McKenna. The healing room is a space intended for people who may get "triggered" by the content in the conference. They can then go for assistance, safety, and peace in this space.



Dr. Mary Hampton



Wendy Kubik's & Brenda Anderson's presentation

We had 23 sessions throughout the day on Friday. Presenters came from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest

Territories. Each session was interesting and timely. Just under 100 folks attended—academics, researchers, and service providers from community agencies. Members of RESOLVE Saskatchewan's steering committee donated their time to host the sessions. Volunteers from RESOLVE Saskatchewan, the SSHRC/CURA, and **Dr. Hampton's** psychology of women class assisted Ann with the heavy lifting, etc.

Once received, presentations will be uploaded for viewing on our website at www.uregina.ca/resolve. ☘



(l-r): Darlene Juschka & Ann Bishop

Alberta Update: New Alberta-led Team Seeking to Help Mothers and Young Children Cope With Toxic Stress



by Nicole Letourneau

Family violence is a toxic stressor

Mothers suffering from *toxic stress*, such as family violence and/or prolonged depression are often consumed by the effort of coping with the difficulties of their everyday lives. Not surprisingly, many of these mothers are challenged to respond sensitively and appropriately to meet the needs of their developing infants. In this way, toxic stress can interfere with the formation of *secure parent-infant attachments*, necessary for healthy infant and child development. Secure attachment represents the infant's emerging expectation that his or her basic needs for soothing, comfort and protection from danger will be met by his or her caregiver. Meta-analyses suggest that while secure parent-infant attachment predicts optimal health and developmental outcomes in children, insecure attachment and particularly, disorganized attachment, predicts symptoms of depression and anxiety, displays of aggression, conduct problems, hostility and psychopathology in children and adults. Exposure to toxic stress related to family dysfunction and abuse in early childhood, has even been associated with the leading causes of adult morbidity, mortality and disability including cardiovascular disease, chronic lung and liver disease, depression and other mental illnesses, as well as obesity, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. This long list of physical and mental health problems suggests pathways for intergenerational transmission of the effects of toxic stress.



Responding to calls for interventions to address toxic stress

In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics produced a landmark document calling for interventions to address the effects of toxic stress. This sentiment is echoed in *Let's Talk About the Early Years*, produced by the Government of Alberta, which recommends that intervention start earlier to reduce the impact of toxic stressors on infants and preschoolers. Attachment interventions may help address the effects of toxic stress exposure as they demonstrate improvements in infant irritability/difficultness, children's behaviour, emotional regulation and neurocognitive development, even

among children exposed to violence and maltreatment. Attachment interventions also reduce maternal stress and depressive symptoms and improve maternal-infant relationships. In response, the Canadian Attachment Network- Action Team on Triadic Attachment and Child Health (CAN-ATTACH) has been created to develop an innovative attachment intervention to help these mother and their young children.

Innovative attachment intervention

In spite of the promise of attachment interventions to address the effects of toxic stress, most have not been evaluated in community-service settings that many mothers access. Traditional attachment intervention models have almost exclusively focused on (some might say, excessively burden) mothers and have not meaningfully included mothers' sources of maternal-infant support in their intervention design. Glaring omissions include grandparents and siblings who – in impoverished and/or extended families from various cultures – often play significant roles in helping young children feel safe and prepare for the outside world, stepping in to parent in support of mothers or in their stead when they are unable or unwilling to care for their infants. Unmarried and divorced mothers typically receive some form of support for their parenting through their extended family, especially during infancy. Existing attachment interventions that do not meaningfully involve mothers' main sources of co-parenting support may be limited in their usefulness for mothers and infants affected by family violence. This is why CAN-ATTACH focuses on the "triad" of mother, infant, and mother's main source of support (the triad).

CAN-ATTACH has thus been created to develop, test and disseminate an innovative attachment intervention that could be integrated into community services for mothers, young children and mothers' primary sources of co-parenting support. We have begun the search for funding and, ultimately CAN-ATTACH seeks to reduce the transmission of intergenerational violence via reducing the effects of toxic stress on mothers and infants. ❀

Mothers and Infants Exposed... cont'd from page 1

maternal sensitivity to infant cues, responsiveness to distress, social–emotional and cognitive growth fostering activities, infant clarity of cues, and responsiveness to caregiver. Mothers and infants scores were compared to those in the NCATS normative database of thousands of mothers from various walks of life.

Results

NCATS mean scores were compared to those of mothers from lower– (grade 12 or less) and higher– (at least some community college or university) educated groups in the NCATS database. On two of four subscales (sensitivity to cues and cognitive growth fostering activities), abused mothers' scores were significantly higher (suggesting more optimal interactions), than the normative NCATS means for either lower educated or higher–educated mothers. However, on two of the subscales (responsiveness to infant distress and social–emotional growth fostering activities), abused mothers' mean scores were significantly lower than the NCATS database, suggesting less optimal interactions than the norms. Children also had a role to play, as they had significantly higher scores on their subscales (clarity of cues and responsiveness to caregiver) than infants in the NCATS normative database. In other words, these infants were very clear in communicating their needs to their caregivers and were more responsive.

Qualitative data revealed that many mothers reported having a stronger relationship with their child because of their experience with IPV. Mothers specifically described how violence interfered with their relationship with their child and how they tried to “make up” for their child's exposure to violence through their interaction. Some ways mothers tried to compensate for, or offset, the negative experiences of their child included: being more soothing, more engaged in playtime, and protective. One mother said, *“I tried to cuddle her more and stuff like that because of everything that she had to see.”*

Consistent with the quantitative findings suggesting improved interactions in most, but not all domains, some mothers spoke of a negative impact. Ten thought the bond with their child was delayed or weakened, 14 spoke about being robotic or not really engaged, 11 indicated that they had been too afraid at times to focus on their mothering, and eight reported being emotionally

unavailable, ex. ignoring crying. One mother described being like *“a robot doing the things that have to be done, but you are not necessarily doing the extra or the fun things.”* Fear interfered with mothers' care giving by making them emotionally distressed, and focused on avoiding violent outbreaks, which could be precipitated by their care giving or the child's behaviour: *“I didn't want to say anything or play with him the wrong way to make <ex-partner> mad or ‘Oh you shouldn't do it that way’. So I just kind of, just watched him basically.”* This created a hostile environment for mothers' care giving, and several mothers thought, in retrospect, that they were “robbed” of part of their child's life, clearly addressing the spillover hypothesis.

Discussion

The significantly higher sample mean scores for the NCATS caregiver sensitivity to cues and cognitive growth fostering subscales compared to the norms suggest that many mothers and infants succeed in compensating for the exposure to IPV. Indeed, an unanticipated finding was that in both NCATS child subscales, children provided clearer cues and were more responsive to their mothers than the norms. These infants' behaviours might also explain mothers' lower (in comparison with the normative sample) mean scores on the responsiveness to distress NCATS subscale. Perhaps mothers did not have to ‘respond to distress’ as the infants were so clear about making their needs known and parents so sensitive, that infants did not become “distressed”. Nonetheless, mothers in this sample scored lower on NCATS response to distress and social emotional growth fostering subscales, suggesting some spillover. Taken together, these findings infer that interaction guidance for mothers and infants exposed to violence can approach families from a strengths–based stance, reinforcing the many positive aspect of interaction and suggesting some areas for future focus to maximize compensation and minimize spillover of IPV into maternal–infant relationships. ❁

**Article references available upon request.*



Announcements, Conferences and Events



November 25–December 10, 2012 - *The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence.* November 25—the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women—marks the first day of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, and December 10—International Human Rights Day—is the final day. The 16 Days of Activism is recognized internationally.

December 6, 2012 - *Sunrise Memorial* hosted by The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council (Status of Women), 8 - 9 a.m., in the Rotunda, Legislative Building, 450 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

December 10, 2012 - *Human Rights Day*

January 23–31, 2013 - *27th Annual San Diego International Conference On Child and Family Maltreatment* presented by the Chadwick Center for Children and Families, in San Diego, CA, USA. The objective of the San Diego Conference is to develop and enhance professional skills and knowledge in the prevention, recognition, assessment and treatment of all forms of maltreatment including those related to family violence as well as to enhance investigative and legal skills. In-depth issues include support for families, prevention, leadership, policy-making. Translating the latest research into action is also addressed. For more information refer to www.sandiegoconference.org.

February 26–March 1, 2013 - *Canadian Domestic Violence Conference 3: New Directions in Practice, Research and Collaboration*, co-sponsored by Bridges and the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre, Gail Appel Institute. The event will be held at the Delta Chelsea Hotel and Conference Centre in Toronto, Ontario. While centering primarily on men's violence against women, the Conference will also provide the opportunity to highlight conversations that are often on the margins of the domestic violence field, including violence in same-sex relationships; violence with people with disabilities; in aboriginal relationships; first generation immigrant relationships; and straight women's perpetration of abuse. For more information refer to www.canadiandomesticviolenceconference.ca, or contact **Shannon Holcomb** at **416-972-1935**, extension **3340**; or e-mail sholcomb@hincksdellcrest.org or training@hincksdellcrest.org.

*National Day of Remembrance and
Action on Violence Against Women*

December 6

December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women in Canada. Established in 1991 by the Parliament of Canada, this day marks the anniversary of the murders in 1989 of 14 young women at l'École Polytechnique de Montréal. They died because they were women.

As well as commemorating the 14 young women whose lives ended in an act of gender-based violence that shocked the nation, December 6 represents an opportunity for Canadians to reflect on the phenomenon of violence against women in our society. This day is also an opportunity to consider the women and girls for who violence is a daily reality, and to remember those who have died as a result of gender-based violence. And finally, it is a day on which communities can consider concrete actions to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Source: www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/vaw-vff/index-eng.html

RESOLVEnews is a quarterly newsletter published by RESOLVE Manitoba. Any submissions, announcements and inquiries can be directed to the RESOLVE office in each of the three prairie provinces or to the editor, Ilze Cepelis, RESOLVE Manitoba - phone (204) 474-8965; fax: (204) 474-7686; e-mail: newsedit@cc.umanitoba.ca



We're finding solutions to protect women and children from violence and abuse!

Phone: **1-877-926-8129** or **(204) 983-1234**

E-mail: **prairieactioninfo@gmail.com**

Web site: **www.prairieaction.ca**

Prairieaction Foundation would like to congratulate the following recipients of the **2012 Community Action, Research & Education (CARE) Grants**. This program furthers our goal to support community-based research into solutions to violence and abuse by funding qualifying charitable organizations to do research projects that identify potential strategies, models and methods to ultimately eliminate these issues.

Family Services Regina (Regina, SK) – *Targets' Experience of Stalking*, \$10,000

Young Women's Christian Association of Brandon (Brandon, MB) – *Mothering, Guiding and Responding to Children: Are There Differences for Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence?*, \$2,000

Ndinawemaaganag Endaawad Inc. (Winnipeg, MB) – *Evaluation of the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program*, \$9,801

You can find out more about these projects on our website at www.prairieaction.ca.



2013 CARE Grants Program NOTICE

The *Call for Letters of Intent* for those interested in receiving a 2013 CARE grant is now available on the Prairieaction Foundation website, www.prairieaction.ca. All *Letters of Intent* must be submitted by January 11, 2013. Applicants will be notified by January 28, 2013, if they are invited to submit a full application. Full applications are due by March 15, 2013.

If you have any questions about the CARE Grants program, contact our Executive Director, **Louise Waldman**, at lwaldman@prairieaction.ca. ☞

RESOLVE Manitoba

~ Dr. Jane Urşel ~
Director (Academic)

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO: 40063171
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

108 Isbister Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

Ph: (204) 474-8965 Fax: (204) 474-7686
E-mail: resolve@umanitoba.ca

Website: www.umanitoba.ca/resolve

RESOLVE Saskatchewan

~ Dr. Mary Hampton ~
Academic Research Coordinator

LC 210, Luther College
University of Regina
Regina, SK S4S 0A2

Ph: (306) 337-2511 Fax: (306) 585-5267
E-mail: resolve@uregina.ca

Website: www.uregina.ca/resolve

RESOLVE Alberta

~ Dr. Nicole Letourneau ~
Academic Research Coordinator

EdT 416
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4

Ph: (403) 220-8181 Fax: (403) 210-8117

E-mail: pkhatavk@ucalgary.ca