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Canadian observatory on the justice system's response to intimate partner violence

Progress Report

2007-2010 (June)

Canadian observatory on the justice system response to intimate partner violence
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Welcome to the Canadian observatory

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In 2007, the Canadian observatory on the justice system's response to intimate partner violence (the *Canadian observatory*) received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a multi-year project to establish a research network. Currently we are an international network of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, and United States. The *Canadian observatory* supports rigorous inter-jurisdictional analysis on justice responses to intimate partner violence. It is housed at the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, University of New Brunswick, under the leadership of Dr. Carmen Gill, Director.

The *Canadian observatory* is comprised of various teams responsible for specific activities of the network. This progress report provides updates on the work of the following current sub-teams and committees: Sub-teams include: Annotated bibliography; Data collection on offenders; Data collection on victims; Dialogue; International opportunities; and Policy.

"This progress report is the first in a series to keep our partners up-to-date on activities."

Annotated bibliography of research in the field of justice responses to intimate partner violence **NOW on WEB**

The team has prepared an annotated bibliography comprised of selected literature literature from Canada, Québec, and international sources pertaining to the justice system response to intimate partner violence. The annotation benefits from a literature review entitled *The Healing Journey*, developed by RESOLVE, and led by Jane Ussel. The current document contains relevant pieces from *The Healing Journey* and incorporates new literature in the field written in English, literature written in French and published in Québec, literature related to the justice system response to immigrant and refugee communities, and relevant literature from international sources, with a particular focus on Australia, United Kingdom, and United States. It covers the period of 2000 to 2009.

Data collection on offenders

The long-term goal of the data collection process is the creation of a national data warehouse for storing and sharing research data on the justice system's response to intimate partner violence. Initially the data warehouse will focus on offenders who are involved with the justice system however future plans also involve the inclusion of data regarding the victims of intimate partner violence. The first task in establishing the data warehouse involved the development of a grid (variable list and code book) to gather information from various sources on offenders in Canada. This instrument which was piloted at a number of sites in 2007-08 ensures that the data collected in various jurisdictions will be comparable regarding the justice system response in intimate partner violence cases.

The next task in establishing the data warehouse involved the development of formal research agreements which provide for the release of information by governments to site researchers and ultimately the Canadian observatory. To date, research agreements have been developed and signed with the Yukon Territorial Government and more recently with the Government of New Brunswick. The first data files from the Yukon were transferred to the Canadian observatory at the University of New Brunswick in March 2010. As data are collected and transferred from various jurisdictions, the Canadian Observatory will be able to share access to the data contained in this national data warehouse with its members for analysis and publication.

"Data collection is key to good policy."

Data collection on victims

A relatively new team has begun to the development of a data collection instrument with a specific focus on victims who are entering the justice system. There is limited information on victims in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) files and thus the activity is a bit challenging. To address the problem, the team is looking first at information collected by Victims Services. It is our hope that the victim-based instrument will supplement the offender-based instrument and this will help us to obtain a better picture of intimate partner violence cases entering in the justice system.

Dialogue

The purpose of this component is to better understand the obstacles facing researchers and help to raise awareness about the importance of sharing data on the justice responses to intimate partner violence. Documenting the outcomes of this component will enable the network to enable a better understanding of the obstacles facing researchers in seeking to access data on the justice system. Team members feel their efforts have been highly successful in establishing substantive dialogue with provincial/territorial/federal governments and feel confident about relationships. A highly successful meeting was recently held in May 2010 with federal and provincial government counterparts.

International Opportunities

In 2008, with funding SSHRC through the International Opportunities Fund (IOF), the Canadian observatory established a research project with team researchers in Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States. The project allowed us to pilot the data collection grid on offenders, to obtain a better international picture of how intimate partner violence cases are processed, and to assess the feasibility of standardized collection processes on an international level.

Compiling policies on justice response to IPV

By documenting government policies the Canadian observatory will be able to make deeper connections among parts of the policy cycle, that is, from a focus on policies, development and intent, to the implementation of policy in practice and procedure, in order to speak to policies impacts. This team compiled federal/provincial/territorial government policies to see what is happening across the country; to identify gaps in the policies or those places where policies are not being implemented or if they went in different directions; to analyze procedures and identify problematic reactions that may not be based on good policy; and to inform our research directions. In its initial phase the work focused on information obtained from government websites. In the current phase, the focus has shifted to confirming the information gathered through review by government and community sources.

New scholarship!

Post doctoral fellowship program

The Canadian observatory invites new scholars to participate in the network through a post doctoral fellowship program. Postdoctoral fellows of the Canadian observatory and their programs of research reflect a diversity of research topics. Cheryl Fraehlich's (University of Manitoba) research involves the use of two longitudinal data sets to explore the outcomes of justice system interventions in cases of intimate partner violence and women's experiences and perceptions of their involvement with the criminal justice system in relation to their experiences of abuse. Elisabeth Wells' (University of Guelph) research focuses on victims' participation in the domestic violence court process, specifically examining the use of Victim Impact Statements, Lanette Ruff's (University of New Brunswick) research focuses on police response to domestic dispute calls; and Steve Sellers' (Griffith's University) research is an investigation of Australian police officers' attitudes and responses to intimate partner violence.

Where we are going? A program of research

Since its inception in 2007, the Canadian observatory has held three face-to-face meetings of members: Calgary, Winnipeg, and Guelph. Each meeting is organized in consultation with the Executive Committee. Current SSHRC funding of the Canadian observatory is for networking purposes only. Thus, the executive committee felt that the 2009 meeting should focus on developing a program of research for the Canadian observatory. The members developed a program of research for the Canadian observatory to respond to the question: What is the impact of the justice system's response on the issue of intimate partner violence? The program of research will be a multi-country analysis of justice responses to address the needs of individuals and communities, and provide stakeholders with an enhanced understanding of how justice systems operate. The Canadian observatory proposes to examine the impact of traditional and specialized justice responses, the processes involved in determining effectiveness of specialized and traditional processes, and the interaction between criminal and civil courts, especially family courts.

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