

**Educating a Generation of Healthy Families: Building Partnerships Between  
schools and Children Who Witness Abuse Programs**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Domestic violence is a salient issue in Canadian society, affecting diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Children who witness this violence are the invisible victims, though they are impacted socially, emotionally, psychologically and academically. Perhaps most concerning is that domestic violence is often shrouded in silence, which exacerbates the effects on child witnesses. It is time that schools take a proactive step in not only helping children who witness abuse, but also preventing this abuse from occurring in the first place. Schools play an important role in shaping the values, attitudes and behaviour of children and youth. They may be the only place in which children can witness positive role models, whether in the form of teachers or peers. As such, schools are a key venue for the implementation of violence-prevention programs. Moreover, schools cannot afford to ignore the issue, as they *are* affected by domestic violence, whether through the aggression, absenteeism or poor academic records of child witnesses. This literature review outlines a number of features that should be included in school-based violence prevention programs in order for them to effectively impact all children, in the hopes that these children will eventually build their own healthy and empathic relationships and families.

## INTRODUCTION:

In order to build a peaceful society, we must begin by creating peaceful homes and schools. It is in these places where children witness and learn the behaviours they will take with them into adulthood, shaping their own relationships and visions of what constitutes a just and equitable society. However, when 500,000 Canadian households experience family violence each year<sup>1</sup> and schools remain silent on the issue, we must question what it is that children are learning. As parents, educators, or community-members, it is time we examine the effects of domestic abuse on children and take proactive steps to prevent a future generation of violence.

Domestic violence is a salient issue: At least 10% of Canadian women in relationships are battered by their partners<sup>2</sup>, with some estimates as high as 25%-80% in Aboriginal communities.<sup>3</sup> In 40-80% of these cases, children witness the abuse and may be the direct targets of violence themselves.<sup>4</sup> Considering that many studies rely on parents to report the frequency and patterns of child witnesses, these statistics are likely to be an underestimate. As Margolin notes, parents often under-report incidents of child witnessing, assuming that the abuse was kept out of the child's sight or earshot.<sup>5</sup>

Witnessing abuse is a broad term that encompasses a variety of experiences. Edleson defines witnessing abuse as "being within visual range of the violence and

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<sup>1</sup> Jaffe Peter G., David A. Wolfe and Susan Kaye Wilson. (1990) *Children of Battered Women*. USA: Sage Publications. Page 18.

<sup>2</sup> Jaffe, Peter G., Elaine Hasting, and Deborah Reitzel. "Child Witnesses of Woman Abuse: How Can Schools Respond?" in *Response*. 79(14): Page 12.

<sup>3</sup> McGillivray, Anne and Brenda Comaskey. (1999) *Black Eyes All of the Time: Intimate Violence, Aboriginal Women, and the Justice System*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Page 13.

<sup>4</sup> National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. (1996) *Wife Abuse – The Impact on Children*. Canada: Health Canada. Page 1.

<sup>5</sup> Margolin, Gayla. (1998) "Effects of Domestic Violence on Children" in Trickett and Shellenbach eds. *Violence Against Children in the Family and the Community*. (pp 57-101). Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association. Page 60.

seeing it occur”.<sup>6</sup> However, as Ganley and Schechter note, children may also experience violence if: they are threatened while the parent is abused, they are used as a hostage by one parent in order to provoke certain behaviour by the other, or they are forced to participate in the aggression themselves.<sup>7</sup> In these cases, children are not merely passive onlookers; “they are actively involved in seeking to make meaning of their experiences and in dealing with the difficult and terrifying situations which confront them”.<sup>8</sup> Children are also forced to rationalize the indirect effects of domestic violence, as they face the potential changes associated with police intervention, parental incarceration, divorce or relocation to a transition house.<sup>9</sup> For these reasons, many authors now choose to use the term “exposed to” rather than “witnesses of” domestic violence, as it is more accurate in describing the child’s experience of hearing and seeing the violence, living in fear and feeling the effects of the aftermath.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Edleson, Jeffrey L. “Children’s Witnessing of Adult Domestic Violence” in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 14(8): August 1999. Page 840.

<sup>7</sup> Ganley and Schechter in Edleson, p 841.

<sup>8</sup> Laing, Lesley. “Children, Young People and Domestic Violence” in *Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse*. Issues Paper 2: 2000. Page 1.

<sup>9</sup> Edleson, p 842.

<sup>10</sup> Jaffe, Peter and Marlies Sudermann. (1999). *A Handbook for Health and Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence*. Ottawa: Health Canada. Page 1.

## EFFECTS OF WITNESSING ABUSE

Witnessing or being exposed to domestic violence has profound effects on the social, emotional, psychological and cognitive functioning of children and tends to vary according to their developmental age and gender. In general, children who witness abuse tend to display more aggressive, antisocial, fearful and inhibited behaviours, anxiety, depression and temperament problems, and lower social competence, than those who do not witness violence.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it has been estimated that 60% of child witnesses suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is manifested through nightmares, painful flashbacks, insomnia, anger and irritability, among others.<sup>12</sup> Jaffe, Hastings and Reitzel have noted that childhood exposure to woman abuse has also been linked to poor peer relations, lowered academic achievement and lack of involvement in extra-curricular sports and activities. As these authors note, the symptoms of witnessing violence vary by age, with pre-school children exhibiting greater behavioural difficulties, and school-aged children displaying higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem.<sup>13</sup> Margolin reaffirms these differences in stating that younger children, who are less able to grasp violence “or to mobilise the resources to cope with violence”, are more likely to act out behaviourally, while older children are more likely to apply “negative evaluations and judgements to abusive interactions”.<sup>14</sup> While there appears to be consistency in the differences noted across developmental stages, further research is needed to determine whether these differences are a result of the stages themselves, or whether they result

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<sup>11</sup> National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women and the Violence Against Women Office. “Toolkit to end Violence Against Women” <http://toolkit.ncjrs.org/> and Edleson, 846.

<sup>12</sup> Jaffe and Sudermann, p 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jaffe, Hastings and Reitzel, p 12.

<sup>14</sup> Margolin, p 78.

from the amount of the child's total exposure to domestic violence, age at initial exposure or several factors combined.

It is also important to consider the factors that help to mitigate the effects of witnessing violence. Margolin points out that the adjustment levels of children who witness violence and are abused themselves are lower than those of children who witness violence but are not abused.<sup>15</sup> Huth-Bocks, Levendosky and Semel add that the internalising and externalising problems and trauma symptoms of children who witness abuse may also be mediated by the mother's self-esteem, her experience with depression, her parenting abilities and stress, as well as her relationship with the child witness.<sup>16</sup> Factors including the role of external role models, such as teachers and community members, also help to determine a child's adjustment level and will be examined in detail later. It is difficult to uniformly determine the effects of these mediating factors on children who witness abuse because the majority of studies have focused on children residing in shelters. As Fantuzzo and Mohr point out, the experiences of these children may not necessarily be representative of all children who witness abuse due to the higher levels of psychological stress they experience compared to those children not living in shelters.<sup>17</sup>

The effects of witnessing violence differ for boys and girls, although there is a general lack of agreement in this area. Jaffe et al. argue that girls who witness abuse are more likely to experience internalising than externalising problems, while boys show

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<sup>15</sup> Margolin, p 76.

<sup>16</sup> Huth-Bocks, Alissa C., Alytia A. Levendosky, and Michael A. Semel. "The Direct and Indirect Effects of Domestic Violence on Young Children's Intellectual Functioning" in *Journal of Family Violence*. 16(3): 2001. Page 274.

<sup>17</sup> Fantuzzo, John W. and Wanda K. Mohr. "Prevalence and Effects of Child Exposure to Domestic Violence" in *The Future of Children*. 9(3): Winter 1999. Page 38.

both internalising and externalising problems.<sup>18</sup> Sudermann and Jaffe note that girls who witness abuse may also feel the need to be “perfectly behaved” and experience an “exaggerated sense of needing to help their mother”.<sup>19</sup> Edleson agrees that while girls who witness abuse generally exhibit evidence of depression and somatic complaints, he states that boys are more likely to act out in hostile and aggressive ways.<sup>20</sup> Margolin points out that while studies have indeed indicated greater behavioural problems and a higher likelihood of suicidal thoughts and running away among boys, this may reflect the fact that several studies on children who witness abuse included boys only.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, in their studies of violence prevention education with seventh graders, Krajewski et. al, found that that at higher levels of domestic violence, boys are more likely to become passive while girls are likely to become more aggressive.<sup>22</sup> These findings illustrate the importance of further research on the effects of the levels, frequency and types of violence witnessed by children, especially with regard to gender.

While there has been a lack of consensus on the gendered effects of witnessing abuse, most studies agree that witnessing domestic violence plays an important factor in determining the acceptability of violence in future relationships for both women and men. A study by Spaccarell et. al, on boys incarcerated for violent crimes illustrated that those who had been exposed to family violence “believed more than others that acting aggressively enhances one’s reputation or self-image”.<sup>23</sup> Head and Jackson concur that

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<sup>18</sup> McKay cited in Marianne James. “Domestic Violence as a Form of Child Abuse: Identification and Prevention” in *Issues in Child Abuse Prevention*. No. 2: 1994. Page 6.

<sup>19</sup> Jaffe and Sudermann, p 9.

<sup>20</sup> Edleson, p 862.

<sup>21</sup> Margolin, p 80.

<sup>22</sup> Krajewski, Sandra S., Mary Fran Rybarik, Margaret F. Dosch, and Gary D. Gilmore. “Results of a Curriculum Intervention with Seventh Graders Regarding Violence in Relationships” in *Journal of Family Violence*. 11(2): 1996. Page 96.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Edleson, p 860.

that boys who witness domestic violence are four times more likely to be physically abusive in their dating relationships than boys who do not witness such violence.<sup>24</sup> Girls who witness abuse may also be more accepting of abuse in future relationships; however, greater empirical research is needed in this area. While there appears to be a strong relationship between witnessing violence and experiencing violence in future relationships, it is important to note that the majority of children who witness domestic violence are not abusive in their families of procreation.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the co-occurrence of witnessing abuse with other factors such as experiencing child-abuse, sexual abuse, poverty and substance abuse, present many challenges for identifying the direct effects of witnessing abuse in the long term.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Carlson and Head, cited p. 12 of Jaffe, Hastings and Reitzel, and Jackson cited in Laing.

<sup>25</sup> Krajewski et. al, p 97.

<sup>26</sup> Margolin, Edleson, Fantuzzo and Mohr, cited p 5, Laing.

## **PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Recognizing the difficulties of measuring the long-term effects of domestic violence, strategies for mitigating these effects are the subject of much debate. Some argue that secondary prevention programs targeting children at-risk, or children who have disclosed domestic violence but who “do not show serious signs of harm”, may be the best use of limited resources.<sup>27</sup> More common than secondary programs are tertiary programs, which are usually court-based and involve identifying perpetrators or victims of domestic violence, punishing or treating perpetrators and supporting the victims. However, Wolfe and Jaffe argue that such programs are not only very expensive, but often offer only limited success in ending domestic violence, addressing the long-term impact and preventing future abuse.<sup>28</sup> The limited success of secondary and tertiary programs in preventing violence may stem from the fact that adults who witnessed domestic violence as children do not account for the high rate of female abuse in society.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, most authors advocate primary prevention strategies, which focus on educating the general population in order to reach potential aggressors who would not normally be identified as “at-risk”. Primary strategies attempt to increase awareness and improve attitudes regarding domestic violence among children and youth in order to positively change their behaviour and empower them.<sup>30</sup> As Laing points out, support for primary prevention efforts is more likely to come from those who view gender inequity

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<sup>27</sup> Laing, p 13.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfe, David A. and Peter G. Jaffe. “Emerging Strategies in the Prevention of Domestic Violence” in *The Future of Children*. 9(3): Winter 1999. Page 136.

<sup>29</sup> Krajewski et al., p 97

<sup>30</sup> O’Brian, p 387.

and learned violent societal attitudes as the causes of domestic violence.<sup>31</sup> Because such programs aim to inform a broad population, Wolfe and Jaffe state that a key benefit is that even if those participating in the program never become victims or perpetrators of domestic violence, “they may have the opportunities in the future, as (informed) community members, to help others in preventing or stopping it”.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, because many children who witness abuse may be difficult to identify, primary prevention programs may be the only way to ensure these children receive the support services they require.<sup>33</sup> As Weis, Marusza, and Fine point out, there is a culture of concealment among school children who have witnessed domestic violence, due to a fear of public embarrassment and scrutiny.<sup>34</sup> According to Peled and Davis, many programs that single out children who have witnessed abuse “inevitably construct a socially deviant identity for these young people”,<sup>35</sup> thereby stigmatizing and ostracizing them from their classmates. In such cases, primary programs that target all students in the school setting have the ability to reach “the socially invisible child witnesses of violence” in a non-stigmatising process.<sup>36</sup> Primary prevention programs are not only more inclusive of child witnesses, they are also more likely to draw the support of parents who would otherwise feel guilty or threatened by programs singling out their children.<sup>37</sup>

Schools classrooms are perhaps the most important venue for primary prevention programs because they have regular access to children and youth and offer greater

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<sup>31</sup> Laing, p 13.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfe and Jaffe, p 138.

<sup>33</sup> Jaffe, Hastings and Reitzel, p 12.

<sup>34</sup> Weis, Lois, Julia Marusza and Michelle Fine. “Out of the Cupboard: kids, domestic violence, and schools” in *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 19(1): 1998. Page 61.

<sup>35</sup> Peled and Davis (1995a, p 11) cited in Laing, p 22.

<sup>36</sup> Peled cited in Laing, p 13.

<sup>37</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson, p 91.

possibilities for imparting key skills and culture, monitoring attendance and rewarding participation in violence prevention programs.<sup>38</sup> Perpetrators of domestic violence often isolate their families from the community as a control tactic. As a result, child witnesses tend to participate less in extra-curricular activities and community events, leaving the school classroom as the only venue where they can access help.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, many families experiencing domestic violence may lack the financial resources necessary to obtain private counselling services. Weis, Marusza and Fine note that with increasing cuts in public spending and resulting shut downs in community services, “the only public space still accessible to poor and working-class children – female children in particular – for talk, safety, analysis and sanctuary may be schools”.<sup>40</sup> However, as Osofsky has noted, the communities most in need of help are usually the most starved of resources; their schools are often overcrowded and understaffed, thereby increasing the difficulty of identifying and providing services to children who have witnessed abuse.<sup>41</sup>

While a lack of resources may be an obstacle for some schools, many authors agree that the cost of ignoring domestic violence is too great for schools to bear. Ultimately, domestic violence affects the classroom through students’ academic difficulties, as well as their absenteeism and high levels of aggression, among other things. Hughes notes that primary school children who have witnessed abuse tend to have poor academic performance and difficulties in concentration. This is reflected in a study by Mathias et. al, who found that 40% of children exposed to domestic violence

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<sup>38</sup> Hilton, N. Zoe, Grant T. Harris, Marnie E. Rice, Tina Smith Krans, and Sandra E. Lavigne. “Antiviolence Education in High Schools” in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 13(6): December 1998, 726-743. Page 7. Indermaur, Atkinson and Blagg, cited in Laing, p 14.

<sup>39</sup> Herman cited Laing, p 2.

<sup>40</sup> Weis et al. p 67.

<sup>41</sup> Osofsky, Joy. (1997) *Children in a Violent Society*. New York: Guildford Press. Page 26.

had reading ages more than a year behind their chronological ages.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Huth-Bocks, Levendosky and Semel found that child witnesses of domestic violence had significantly lower results on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R) and also performed below national norms on this test, compared with children who had not witnessed abuse. No differences were noted in the children's visual-spatial skills.<sup>43</sup> Witnessing domestic violence also affects children's academic abilities indirectly, as families experiencing abuse are generally less able to provide intellectually stimulating home environments, whether due to the instability of violence or resulting maternal depression.<sup>44</sup> Further research is needed on the home environments of families living with domestic violence, but as Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson note, schools may be the only source of routine and stability for children who witness abuse.<sup>45</sup>

Violence also jeopardizes the long-term successes of child witnesses. Flannery has found that children who witness chronic violence may have troubles developing a sense of initiative due to feelings of hopelessness about their future.<sup>46</sup> Because their confidence in the future is undermined, Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson claim these children face difficulties setting long-term goals, which ultimately affects not only their academic success, but also their ability to work towards greater projects in life.<sup>47</sup> The ability to work effectively towards long-term goals is also undermined by the frequent absences of child witnesses, who miss classes in order to take care of their mother or their siblings

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<sup>42</sup> Cited in James, p 6.

<sup>43</sup> Huth-Bocks et al., p 280.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p 286.

<sup>45</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 23.

<sup>46</sup> Flannery, Daniel J. "Improving School Violence Prevention Programs Through Meaningful Evaluation" in *Choices in Preventing Youth Violence*. No.2: 1999. Page 3.

<sup>47</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 26.

when their mother is injured.<sup>48</sup> In order to understand the academic challenges facing children who witness abuse, it may be necessary for teachers to first recognise the underlying causes of these challenges, which requires breaking the silence surrounding domestic violence in schools.

The need to address domestic violence in schools is compounded by the fact that 3-5 children in every classroom have witnessed their mother being assaulted at home.<sup>49</sup> Teachers may inadvertently be forced to confront the reality faced by these children through their spontaneous remarks, their artwork or their reactions to classroom discussions and presentations. While comments and drawings may be subtle indicators of children's experiences with domestic violence, these experiences may also affect the classroom in much more overt ways. Wexler estimates that between 20-40% of chronically violent adolescents had witnessed extreme parental conflict.<sup>50</sup> Osofsky claims that because children who have witnessed such conflict view their world as unpredictable, and because they have been exposed to unexpected violence, they begin to expect such violence from others. As a result, children who witness abuse may begin to interpret the intentions and actions of their peers as aggressive, and in turn, respond with aggression.<sup>51</sup> When confronted with such aggression in the classroom, Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson argue that teachers must be aware of the direct and indirect impact of family violence on students in order to respond effectively.<sup>52</sup>

Given the high levels of aggression at home, schools may possibly be the only venue in which children can witness alternative behaviour and positive role models.

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<sup>48</sup> National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. (1996) *Wife Abuse – The Impact on Children*. Canada: Health Canada. Page 3.

<sup>49</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 113.

<sup>50</sup> Wexler 1990 cited in James, p 7.

<sup>51</sup> Osofsky, p 192.

<sup>52</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 113.

Osofsky notes that witnessing violence has a powerful impact on the child's developing sense of "the social contract", which includes the child's perception and internalisation of his or her responsibilities and moral rights, as well his or her understanding of social justice and fairness.<sup>53</sup> Pohan argues that schools may shape this sense of the social contract and counter negative attitudes learned at home by promoting attitudes of fairness, respect, empathy and equity among children through primary violence prevention programs.<sup>54</sup> Kagan takes this one step further by arguing that schools indeed have a responsibility to become partners in the "social agenda".<sup>55</sup> This may appear to imply a large burden for teachers; however, the role of students as peer educators should not be underestimated.

In adolescence, youth rely mainly on peer groups for advice and guidance in matters of social behaviour and attitudes, dress and identity. Because of the influence of peer groups, Shiner argues that peer education has been a popular tool in primary violence prevention efforts because it focuses on a natural process in which youth learn from each other as part of their day to day life.<sup>56</sup> In their study of dating-violence workshops targeting grade 11 students in four Ontario high schools, Hilton et al. found that at the immediate post-test, students' knowledge scores on violence-related issues had only improved for the workshops they had chosen to attend. However, at the time of the 6-week follow-up evaluation, students' scores had improved on issues covered even in those workshops they had not attended. The authors of this study believe that the

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<sup>53</sup> Murphy, Lisa, Robert S. Pynoos, and C. Boyd James. (1997) "The Trauma/Grief-Focused Group Psychotherapy Module of an Elementary School-Based Violence Prevention/Intervention Program" in Joy D. Osofsky ed. *Children in a Violent Society*. (pp 223- 255). New York: Guilford Press. Page 224.

<sup>54</sup> Pohan, Cathy. "Practical Ideas for Teaching Children about Prejudice, Discrimination, and Social Justice through Literature and a Standards-Based Curriculum" in *Multicultural Perspectives*. 2(1): 2000. Page 1.

<sup>55</sup> Kagan, Sharon L. "Support Systems for Children, Youths, Families and Schools in Inner-City Situations" in *Education & Urban Society*. 29(3): May 1997. Page 7.

<sup>56</sup> Shiner (1999 p. 555), cited in Laing, p 5.

students themselves had become multipliers of the violence-prevention information within their own peer groups, sharing the information learned in their respective workshops.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, Avery-Leaf and Cascardi advocate schools as an excellent place for primary prevention programs because they can help to introduce a climate of zero-tolerance among peer groups, which can then become agents of change for their members.<sup>58</sup> This may be particularly relevant for domestic violence prevention programs, as Jackson and Szyndrowski cite evidence that male relationship violence is influenced by male peer support.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hilton et. al, p 6.

<sup>58</sup> Avery-Leaf, Sarah and Michele Cascardi. (2002) "Dating Violence Education: Prevention and Early Intervention Strategies" in Paul A. Schewe ed. *Preventing Violence in Relationships: Interventions Across the Life Span*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association. Page 96.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson cited in Laing, 5. Szyndrowski, Deanna. "The Impact of Domestic Violence on Adolescent Aggression in the Schools" in *Preventing School Failure*. 44(1): Fall 99. Page 2.

## FACTORS FOR PROGRAM SUCCESS

### A) Addressing Behaviour and Attitudes towards Power and Gender

Given the role of social groups in creating norms of acceptable attitudes and behaviours, schools are deemed to be an excellent venue for illustrating the social context of domestic violence. Krajewski et. al contend that successful primary prevention programs can help youth to understand domestic violence not only as a question of interpersonal conflict, but as a phenomenon sustained by attitudes and a culture that promote tolerance of woman abuse in society<sup>60</sup>. Boys and girls can be educated to view the problem not only as personal, but as social and political as well, illustrating the links between violence and inequality.<sup>61</sup> Such programs can help children to question why younger students, girls, visible minorities and students with learning difficulties are more likely to be victimised than other students<sup>62</sup> and why male students who experience greater degrees of powerlessness express higher levels of violence against female youth.<sup>63</sup> In their study of secondary school primary prevention programs, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel and Killip found that primary prevention programs were especially useful in illustrating that women in abusive relationships not only faced personal safety concerns, but also economic and social barriers related to questions of power and control.<sup>64</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi note, however, that focusing programs on the relationship between gender-based inequities in society at large and male abuses of control within intimate

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<sup>60</sup> Krajewski et al., p 98.

<sup>61</sup> Weis et al., p 70.

<sup>62</sup> Jaffe and Sudermann, p 46.

<sup>63</sup> Schissel, Bernard. "Boys Against Girls: The Structural and Interpersonal Dimensions of Violent Patriarchal Culture in the Lives of Young Men" in *Violence Against Women*. 6(9): September 2000. Page 970.

<sup>64</sup> Jaffe, Peter G., Marlies Sudermann, Deborah Reitzel and Steve M. Killip. "An Evaluation of a Secondary School Primary Prevention Program on Violence in Intimate Relationships" in *Violence and Victims*. 7(2): 1992. Page 142.

relationships may fail to address the problem of female aggression against male partners.<sup>65</sup>

Addressing the links between gender, violence, power and control not only involves raising awareness, but also requires changing behaviour and attitudes. As Hilton et. al note, the benefits of anti-violence education are usually reported in knowledge improvements regarding community resources and conflict resolution strategies, but attitude change is often ambiguous and prevention programs can at times lead to attitude backlash.<sup>66</sup> It is important to note that in creating such programs, special attention should be paid to avoid undesirable changes in attitude or behaviour. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent violence-prevention programs are able to change children's behaviour concerning violence against women, given the difficulties of measuring the long-term impact of these programs.<sup>67</sup> While Avery-Leaf and Cascardi acknowledge that changing attitudes is a productive element of violence prevention work, they note that the challenge of doing so results from questions regarding which specific attitudes require change. Further research is needed on the links between specific attitudes and relationship violence, as well as how attitudes can be changed without experiencing backlash.

## **B) Building a Culture of Change**

Regardless of these difficulties, O'Brian notes that behavioural change among students is more likely to occur if their social and physical environments are supportive

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<sup>65</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, p 83.

<sup>66</sup> Hilton et al., p 2.

<sup>67</sup> O'Brian, p 397.

and encouraging of non-violence.<sup>68</sup> O'Brian, Jaffe et. al and Krajewski et. al, concur that violence prevention programs should focus on fostering non-violence in the behaviour and actions of the entire school staff, including teachers, administrators and parents, in order to make the school climate conducive to a successful intervention.<sup>69</sup> Schissel believes that as a part of this holistic change, schools must reconsider how they address activities beyond the classroom, such as school sports, which have played a large role in socialising boys and girls into gender roles that sanction violence. Schissel argues that the segregated context of school sports have facilitated the creation of a language and practice "that equate toughness and prowess within a male discourse" whereas "failure, kindness, and fairness, constitute a feminized discourse". In this framework, girls and women are viewed as 'the other', the opponent or the enemy, and males cling to notions of success based on physical aggression and sexual conquest if they are not empowered in more proactive ways.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, behavioural change and changes in school culture require co-ordinated efforts over time. In its Toolkit to end Violence Against Women, the National Advisory Council on Women Against Violence stresses that successful violence prevention programs are long-term efforts, often as long as several years.<sup>71</sup> This is supported by Krajewski et. al, who note that longitudinal studies on the impact of violence prevention programs indicate that the impact of such programs weakens in as little as two years. These authors therefore encourage teachers to integrate violence-free principles and resources "directly into the curricular process", rather than relying on one-time interventions to affect behavioural and knowledge change.<sup>72</sup> Skills and attitudes learned in violence prevention programs must be reinforced and practiced over time and at different developmental stages in order to have lasting effects.

A critical element of prevention education therefore not only includes shaping children's behaviour over time, but also changing the school curriculum, which requires educating teachers and administrators on the dynamics of violence. Avery-Leaf and

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p 388.

<sup>69</sup> O'Brian, p 388. Jaffe, Hasting and Reitzel, p 14. Krajewski et al., p 104.

<sup>70</sup> Schissel, p 973

<sup>71</sup> National Advisory Council

<sup>72</sup> Krajewski et al., p 102.

Cascardi argue that one of the most important factors for successful prevention programs is the competence of program facilitators or implementers. The authors found that positive responses from students in dating violence prevention programs were significantly linked to the teacher's knowledge and comfort with the subject. Moreover, teachers who were trained in the issue were able to ensure that the positive messages were reinforced over time, rather than in a single presentation or intervention.<sup>73</sup> Osofsky and Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson agree on the importance of in-service or professional training for teachers, which would include information on wife abuse as a major social and criminal problem in society; the indirect and direct effects of witnessing family violence; the special intervention required by schools to mitigate the academic, social and emotional effects of witnessing; the important role played by teachers in modelling effective conflict resolution and gender roles; as well as information on the resources available in the community to help children and families.<sup>74</sup> To this list, Osofsky adds the importance of training on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the resilience and coping factors of children, which would help teachers to overcome feelings of helplessness on the subject.<sup>75</sup> However, the current literature offers only limited insight into the factors that strengthen children's resilience, and further research is needed in this area in order to develop effective prevention programs.

In order to facilitate teacher training and changes in school culture, Osofsky notes that administrative support cannot be overestimated.<sup>76</sup> School superintendents, boards of trustees, school boards and parent associations must first support raising awareness of the

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<sup>73</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, p 98-100.

<sup>74</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 113.

<sup>75</sup> Osofsky, p 193.

<sup>76</sup> Osofsky, p 193.

issue in order to develop a cohesive school protocol for responding to domestic violence. According to Jaffe et. al, the next step in developing a protocol is to offer training sessions for principals and vice-principals from each school on the problem of woman abuse and its effects on child witnesses because “administrators of each school need to be convinced that it is imperative for the school system to respond to the needs of these children”.<sup>77</sup> Once principals are trained, committees of all interested teachers, counsellors and resource staff could be created, with each member receiving in-depth training on the issues. Once school staff members are educated on the issue of domestic violence, schools should develop policies concerning the safety and privacy issues of students residing in shelters and policies for interviewing mothers when children have disclosed. Sudermann and Jaffe highlight the importance of obtaining legal advice in all steps of this process.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Jaffe, Hastings and Reitzel, p 13.

<sup>78</sup> Jaffe and Sudermann, p 41.

### **C) School-Community Partnerships**

Addressing domestic violence in their classrooms, however, does not imply that teachers should be forced to work in isolation, as therapists or social workers.<sup>79</sup> For this reason, many authors argue that community, parent and shelter involvement is necessary for the successful implementation of violence prevention programs in schools. According to Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, shelters have been at the forefront of raising awareness of family violence issues and can offer schools a wealth of expertise otherwise unavailable to teachers.<sup>80</sup> Staff members from agencies dealing with domestic violence know the material well and will be comfortable presenting the topic, which will enable them to discuss concepts frankly with children and handle potential disclosures. While many shelters offer programs to respond to children outside of the school system, Edleson notes that these programs have a narrower audience and will not be as successful in influencing school staff if they are only offered as sporadic presentations rather than as built in elements of the school curriculum.<sup>81</sup>

Given the concerns with ever-increasing demands on school time, many authors agree that the ideal is perhaps an integration of external and internal programs, whereby staff from professional agencies present prevention materials within the school curriculum, while providing supplementary materials for teachers to make use of in follow-up discussions. Integrating violence prevention programs to the school curriculum can involve anything from teaching children to be critical readers and thinkers, identifying themes of violence, gender and power in their daily activities, or

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<sup>80</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 98.

<sup>81</sup> Edleson, p 131.

programs that include special workshops, role playing, and discussions.<sup>82</sup> Jaffe et al also note that parents can be active partners and advocates in the development of new curriculum materials,<sup>83</sup> and involving parents can strengthen their ability to be positive role models, thereby sharing in the teaching of non-violent principles.<sup>84</sup> However, it is important to note that in order to be successfully integrated into the school curriculum, programs must be flexible and structured so that parent involvement, teacher style and “class personality add to the impact of the program rather than detract from it”.<sup>85</sup>

#### **D) Domestic Violence and Cultural Diversity**

In order to determine which program works best for a given school, the school’s student body, resources and circumstances should be taken into consideration.<sup>86</sup> Considering that more than five million Canadians are born in other countries, domestic violence prevention programs must consider cultural differences. In many cultures, domestic violence is rarely addressed and gender roles are often quite different than those found in the dominant Canadian culture. As Preston et. al note, in many immigrant cultures, children may not consider discussing the issue of family violence outside the home because there is substantial denial of an issue that is considered to be a private matter. Disclosure in some cases would be tantamount to betrayal of the family’s image.<sup>87</sup> Language barriers may also prevent some children from raising concerns about their home experiences.

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<sup>82</sup> *School-based Violence Prevention Programs: A Resource Manual.*

[www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/violenceprevention/English/prevprog.htm](http://www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/violenceprevention/English/prevprog.htm)

<sup>83</sup> Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, p 115.

<sup>84</sup> School-Based Violence Prevention

<sup>85</sup> O’Brian, p 413.

<sup>86</sup> Flannery, p 1.

<sup>87</sup> Preston, Barbara, Shashi Assanand, Mario Calla, Gordon Hardy, Melpa Kamateros, and Madelin Ziniak. (2000) “Child Witnesses in Immigrant Families: Vulnerable but Invisible” in *Creating a Legacy of Hope: Conference Proceedings*. Vancouver: B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses. Pages 21-22.

Children of immigrant parents are also often socialised in families where the idea of a female head is “virtually unknown”, and where women are taught values of submission and acceptance. This may create conflicts for immigrant children in violence prevention programs that teach values of assertiveness. A further role reversal results from the fact that many domestic violence prevention programs focus on the idea that children are not responsible for the problems of their parents, however, “this teaching would be completely counter to home teachings in cultures that hold family needs above individual ones”.<sup>88</sup> This sense of role reversal could also be exacerbated by the fact that immigrant children often become the family’s representative, given their parents’ limited language skills. This places a particular stress on children who witness abuse, as it is mostly their immigrant mothers rather than fathers that speak neither of the official languages fluently. Moreover, because of their status as immigrants, many abused women fear the court system and losing their status as Canadian citizens. When an abused mother depends on the child witness to provide comfort or assist her in accessing the justice system, “the child is thrown into the uncomfortable position of deciding for, negotiating for, or even physically intervening for her”.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, as Margolin and Laing point out, few studies on child witnesses have identified the particular challenges facing children from various ethnic groups or the role of culture in domestic violence, and further research is needed in this area.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of the silence surrounding domestic violence and the complications resulting from language barriers and role reversals, the problem of domestic violence

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<sup>88</sup> Staddon, Naomi. (1993) *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introductory Manual on the Impact of Family Violence for Multicultural Home/School Workers*. Vancouver: Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society. Page 26-33.

<sup>89</sup> Preston et al., p 34.

<sup>90</sup> Margolin, p 84.

appears to be moot in immigrant communities. Consequently, the victims are invisible, and there is no pressure on the system to respond with services.<sup>91</sup> For example, Kazarian and Kazarian note that some young women from immigrant families experiencing abuse may rush through their education or attempt to find jobs prior to achieving the highest level of education possible, “striving for an early but culturally approved means of escape from the family setting”.<sup>92</sup> What may at first appear to be professional ambition, may in fact be a veil for domestic violence. School-based programs addressing domestic violence must therefore pay special attention to the needs of immigrant children, even though these needs may not be overtly expressed. Furthermore, such programs should be cautious to avoid exacerbating the stigmatisation experienced by immigrant children who attend ESL classes which often contribute to low self-esteem, loneliness and cultural negation.<sup>93</sup>

School-based prevention programs addressing domestic violence in First Nations communities must also be culturally sensitive and inclusive, while examining the specific history of these communities. Prior to colonisation, aboriginal communities had been matriarchal in nature, with women traditionally acting as the decision-makers in their homes and communities.<sup>94</sup> However, Lutz points out that gender roles were reversed by the same process of colonisation that devalued aboriginal languages and cultures, leading “to many dysfunctional adult relationships and behaviours”.<sup>95</sup> The structural violence facing aboriginal communities and the lack of positive relationship examples, among

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<sup>91</sup> Preston et al., p 35.

<sup>92</sup> Kazarian and Kazarian qtd. in Jaffe and Sudermann, p 10.

<sup>93</sup> Cheboud, Elias. “Allowing, Adjusting, Achieving: Helping Immigrant Children Deal with Acculturation in the School System” in *The B.C. Counsellor*. 22(2): 2000. Page 48.

<sup>94</sup> Perrault, Sharon and Jocelyn Proulx. (2000) *No Place for Violence: Canadian Aboriginal Alternatives*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing. Page 16.

<sup>95</sup> Lutz, Sherri. (1994) *Family Violence: A Handbook for First Nations Workers*. Canada: First Nations Education Association. Page 10.

other things, has also resulted in a high incidence of dating violence among aboriginal youth.<sup>96</sup>

Programs to empower youth and foster positive relationships must consider the important role the community has played in the culture and traditions of First Nations peoples. Proulx and Perrault emphasize the community's role in educating children and helping them to heal from violence, as it is the community and its teaching that ultimately define the identities of individuals. It is also important to involve the community because, as the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stated, family violence "has invaded whole communities and cannot be considered a problem of a particular couple or an individual household."<sup>97</sup> These programs must not only address the entire community, but they must embrace the spectrum of problems faced by these communities, taking into account the interrelationship between domestic violence, high suicide rates among aboriginal youth, substance abuse, unemployment, poverty and feelings of hopelessness.<sup>98</sup> Unless holistic solutions are devised by the community and address the problems of the community, MacGillivray and Comaskey state that their chances of success are minimal.

School-based programs addressing family violence are particularly important for First Nations children in rural and northern areas because outside services are scarce in these communities, forcing families in crisis to travel to urban areas in order to seek help, thus losing the comfort of their support systems.<sup>99</sup> As Clark notes, school-based primary prevention programs that target the entire school population are also important in helping

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<sup>96</sup> Schissel, p 969.

<sup>97</sup> Perrault and Proulx, p 23.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p 35.

<sup>99</sup> Perrault and Proulx, p 19.

first nations students who would otherwise be reluctant to seek help from professional services in their small communities, due to a lack of anonymity and fear of embarrassment and stigmatisation.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, these school-based programs must focus on changing the school culture and training teachers and administrators to model appropriate behaviour, as First Nations children were traditionally taught values and beliefs by copying or modelling the behaviour of their parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and elders.<sup>101</sup> Greater research on the relationship between First Nations child witnesses and the school system is needed, however, as the majority of research on aboriginal family violence deals with the role of the court system.

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<sup>100</sup> Ministry of Attorney General. (1996) *Working With Aboriginal Child Victim Witnesses: Part Two Literature Review*. British Columbia: Ministry of Attorney General. Page 16.

<sup>101</sup> Lutz, p 7.

## E) Integrating Approaches

As the problems faced by children of aboriginal, immigrant or dominant-culture descent vary, so too do the means by which they may be addressed. Certain authors argue that it is important to address many social issues including bullying, sexual abuse, dating violence, discrimination and sexual harassment, among others, within a holistic violence prevention framework. These authors argue that traditional single-focus prevention programs have failed to acknowledge “the fundamental similarity between all forms of abuse: one person (or group of people) exercising power and control over another”.<sup>102</sup> However, others advocate a focus on dating violence programs because these have perhaps most successfully recognised the power and control dynamics that lead to domestic abuse. According to Jaffe et. al, many girls continue to base their self worth on their ability to keep a boyfriend, regardless of his behaviour. Dating-violence prevention programs are key to helping young girls reject abusive behaviour and build a stronger sense of self-esteem.<sup>103</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi also advocate school-based dating-violence prevention programs because exposure to abuse in early relationships may lead adolescents to develop frameworks for partner selection based on the idea that aggression is normal.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel and Killip note that by the time they reach adolescence, many boys and girls have already become involved in abusive relationships, or know someone else who has. Mercer supports these findings with his study of young women in Toronto-area high schools, noting an 11% incidence of physical abuse, 17% verbal abuse, and 20% sexual abuse in their dating relationships.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> School-based Violence Prevention Programs

<sup>103</sup> Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel and Killip, p 131.

<sup>104</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, p 82.

<sup>105</sup> Mercer cited in Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, p 91.

The literature has focused on dating violence rather than bullying prevention programs as key to ending the cycle of domestic violence because dating violence programs address the issue of abuse in intimate relationships rather than violence in broader society. As Margolin notes, exposure to marital violence points to increased risk for aggression with parents, siblings, dating partners, and future spouses and children. She argues that by witnessing inter-parental violence, children are not “learning the execution of specific aggressive behaviours – these they learn on the playground by age 5. More significantly, children are learning about the conditions under which aggression may be applied in intimate relationships”.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, dating violence prevention programs are essential in helping adolescents to learn that no conditions for violence in intimate relationships are acceptable.

It is important to note that there are many questions surrounding the implementation of dating violence programs in schools. These include whether to offer programs to mix-gendered groups; whether to focus on female and male aggression; and whether to include skills-based programs because of their implications for victim blaming.<sup>107</sup> The theory behind skills-based violence prevention programs is that many adolescents fail to develop the psychological and social skills necessary for carrying out many developmental tasks. This lack of skills leads to frustration and emotive responses, which may in time result in anger and aggressive behaviour.<sup>108</sup> The problem, however, with skills-based approaches is that their unintended message may be that a victim’s poor anger management, communication or safety skills are the cause for a partner’s

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<sup>106</sup> Margolin, p 88.

<sup>107</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, p 84.

<sup>108</sup> Wilson-Brewer, Renne and Howard Spivak. “Violence Prevention in Schools and Other Community Settings: The Pediatrician as Initiator, Educator, Collaborator, and Advocate” in *Pediatrics*. 94(4): October 1994. Page 4.

aggression.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, studies done by Powell, Mui-McClain and Halasyamani and O'Brian indicate that there is little evidence to suggest that school-based programs focusing on social skills reduce violent behaviour or aggression in the short term or long term.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the lack of proof of long-term results, many programs aimed at violence prevention focus specifically on conflict resolution skills. These include helping children to develop empathy, communication, impulse control and anger management skills. Role-playing in conflict situations is almost always a component of such programs and is often followed by discussions of the causes and consequences of violence.<sup>111</sup> However, as Schissel notes, the problem with many conflict resolution programs is that they “teach and preach”, but must focus more on addressing the real-life aggressive situations within the classroom which would enable students to gain empathy for each other.<sup>112</sup> Schissel cites a successful program at Princess Alexandria Elementary School in Saskatchewan, where the school meets in an open forum as a community of children and adults in order to discuss issues of assault and abuse each time they occur. These forums foster frank discussion while de-stigmatizing the victim and promoting understanding among students, and between students and teachers. Moreover, they enable male and female students to return to the classroom “in an atmosphere of understanding and not a gendered atmosphere of pity and fear”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Avery-Leaf and Cascardi, p 84.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in O'Brian, p 388.

<sup>111</sup> Brewer et al., p 2.

<sup>112</sup> Schissel, p 980.

<sup>113</sup> Schissel, p 978.

## **F) Developmental Stages and Gender**

When selecting conflict resolution, skills-based or dating violence programs, schools must cater to the developmental stages of their students. O'Brian recommends that schools begin with a general anti-violence approach with younger children, while offering programs on dating and domestic violence for older grades, as the topics gain greater relevance.<sup>114</sup> According to Wolfe and Jaffe, successful violence prevention programs dealing with children should focus on creating trust and teaching safety skills so that children will disclose when faced with domestic violence. The younger ages could also be a time for imparting social skills such as conflict resolution and anger management.

However, most authors agree that in aiming to prevent the cycle of domestic violence, most programs should target adolescents. James notes that adolescence is perhaps the best time for addressing questions of family violence in schools because it is then that youth become aware of the "different ways of thinking, feeling and acting in the world from those to which they have been exposed". She cites that between the ages of 8-12, the behaviour of violent role models has not yet become entrenched in the behavioural and social learning processes of youth.<sup>115</sup> Indermaur et. al concur that research "consistently points to the early years (prior to twelve years of age) as critical in the establishment of aggressive and violent response styles".<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Krajewski et. al note that the ages of 12-13 represent an ideal time for domestic violence prevention education because at this stage, adolescents are in the process of "acquiring the less flexible gender roles related to becoming women and men" and begin to experiment with

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<sup>114</sup> O'Brian, p 413.

<sup>115</sup> James, p 9.

<sup>116</sup> Indermaur et al. cited in Laing, p 14.

their own intimate relationships.<sup>117</sup> This age thus provides an excellent opportunity for programs to reconstruct gender identities and empower students to build relationships based on empathy rather than power and control.

Successful violence prevention programs must not only address the target ages of the participating students, they must also consider the various gender needs and approaches. Hilton et. al suggest that program evaluations should take into consideration the gender of the population involved in order to avoid perpetuating the problem of violence. For example, attitude backlashes resulting from violence prevention programs occur primarily among boys.<sup>118</sup> In their studies of a high-school anti-dating violence program, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel and Killip also noted high levels of male defensiveness in discussion groups and post-test questionnaire responses.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, evaluations of violence prevention programs conducted by Artz et. al illustrated that girls scored higher in appropriate knowledge and attitudes towards dating violence both before and after prevention programs than did boys in the same class, indicating that prevention programs may need to begin working with boys at a younger age or target boys and girls differently at different stages.<sup>120</sup>

Some authors advocate conducting prevention programs in gender-specific groups, given that boys and girls are violent in different situations and have different learning patterns.<sup>121</sup> In their study of a violence prevention program in Vancouver Island schools, Artz et. al found that over three years, male responsibility for violent incidents had declined by 49%. Since the prevention program focused on activities such as talent

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<sup>117</sup> Krajewski et al., p 103.

<sup>118</sup> Hilton et al., p 2.

<sup>119</sup> Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel and Killip, p 144.

<sup>120</sup> School-based Violence Prevention Programs

<sup>121</sup> Resolve website

shows, which promoted pro-social behaviour, the authors agreed that boys respond well to activities that single them out for positive behaviour.<sup>122</sup> In contrast, Artz et. al found that female students responded better to violence prevention programs based on one-way information sharing, such as presentations by experts and consciousness-raising activities. Boys only seemed to respond positively to such activities when they were combined with activities that engaged students, such as contests and student-led drama presentations. According to Artz. et al, the differences in boys and girls' approaches to learning is explained by the fact that boys and girls are at different starting points concerning the problem of violence and their attitudes towards it. These different starting points are largely a result of cultural conditioning which encourages boys to embrace power, aggression and a lack of emotions as symbols of their masculine identity.<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, studies have shown that girls and young women rate separate gender groups as more positive than mixed gender groups for sensitive topics like dating violence. However, a mixed-group session is also important as it provides each gender with the opportunity to learn about the experiences and concerns of the other.<sup>124</sup> Future research must focus on the most effective means of addressing male defensiveness and reaching high-risk groups such as abusive males or males who have witnessed wife abuse at home. Further research is also needed on how boys and girls may learn positive values and attitudes from each other in peer-education based activities.

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<sup>122</sup> Artz, et. al, p 10.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p 28.

<sup>124</sup> School-based Violence Prevention Programs

## CONCLUSION

Domestic violence is a problem that must be addressed in Canadian schools. Although programs aimed at reducing interpersonal conflict have been introduced to the school curriculum, those designed to help child witnesses have not been emphasized because the sensitive nature of the issue “carries with it some political heat based on the discomfort of those who are not yet able to acknowledge the incidence or extent of domestic violence in their communities”.<sup>125</sup> While evaluations of the long-term effectiveness of such programs are lacking, existing studies do point to several factors as critical to program success. Successful primary prevention programs should raise awareness of power and gender relations while attempting to change student behaviours and attitudes. Programs should also foster changes in school culture, which involves educating teachers and administrators. Moreover, successful violence prevention programs should be integrated to the school curriculum and be implemented over time in order to ensure that changes are maintained. Community and parent involvement in primary prevention programs is also key to ensuring their success. Programs should be flexible and respectful of cultural diversity in order to respond to the needs of all students involved. They should be tailored to the developmental stages and gender of the participants in order to engage students and ultimately shape their attitudes and behaviour regarding domestic violence.

Implementing a school-based domestic violence prevention program requires time, a coordinated effort, funding and political will. While the challenge may appear daunting, the alternative of maintaining a complicit silence on the issue may in fact

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<sup>125</sup> Jenkins, Renee R., and Janice G. Hutchinson. “The Public Health Model for Violence Prevention: A Partnership in Medicine and Education” in *Journal of Negro Education*. 65(3) Summer 1996, 255-266. Page 259.

exacerbate the symptoms and effects on children who witness abuse. Schools are in a privileged position to access a generation of youth and provide examples of positive behaviour. With this privilege comes the opportunity to break the cycle of violence and shape society towards a model of non-violence.

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