

critical issues on violence against women

international perspectives
and promising strategies

edited by holly johnson,
bonnie s. fisher, and
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Global Issues in

Crime and Justice

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New approaches to assessing effectiveness and outcomes of domestic violence perpetrator programs

Liz Kelly and Nicole Westmarland

I'm just not convinced, my instinct tells me perpetrator programs don't work.
(Chief executive)

Well, I think they're bollocks. That's what I came here to say.
(Victim-survivor)

To say that domestic violence perpetrator programs (DVPPs) are still controversial is perhaps to understate the strength of feelings held by some, including those quoted above, who attended a recent workshop about DVPPs. As Chung (this volume) notes, despite a four-decade history of such programs, doubts about their effectiveness persist. However, given that many offenders continue abuse after separation, or abuse new partners, and that most who are fathers will be awarded child contact, there is surely a necessity, rather than an option, to do "something" with men about their violence.

We are in the process of conducting a British evaluation of DVPPs, comparing (amongst other things) women whose partners have been on a program with women whose partners have not been on a program. We do not yet know the changes that such programs make. However, we do know that DVPPs have been held to a narrow and, we argue, unhelpful, definition of what "success" means, while being held to a standard higher and more rigid than most other social and even medical interventions. In this chapter, we describe what we mean by this, outline the indicators we have developed to extend measures of success, and give examples from our ongoing research that investigates what (non-criminal justice) DVPPs "add" to coordinated community responses to domestic violence (DV) using Project Mirabal as an example.¹

British domestic violence perpetrator programs

Despite advances in research, policy, and practice, DV shows only minimal signs of abating. It continues to blight the lives of (predominantly) women and children as victims and survivors and men as perpetrators. The focus of much work to date

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Chapter 14

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has been on interventions to improve the safety of women and children: for example, women's refuges and advocacy. It has become clear that to reduce and prevent DV, the spotlight must be placed on men and their behavior, alongside, rather than replacing, interventions for women and children.

One response to DV perpetrators is to refer them to a DVPP. In England and Wales (but not Scotland) these have traditionally been divided into "criminal justice" and "community" programs. However, as "community" programs, which historically took many voluntary referrals, are increasingly being filled with child protection and child contact referrals (from social work and family courts), a more accurate description probably is "non-criminal justice." Most services that run British DVPPs are members of the organization Respect, which, amongst other things, runs the Respect phoneline, the UK helpline for domestic violence perpetrators, and manages the accreditation of programs.² The Respect Accreditation Standard sets out the requirements for organizations to manage DVPPs and integrated support services (ISS) for current and former partners. It is important, for contextual reasons, to understand that having ISS for (ex-)partners is an essential and "normalized" part of running a DVPP in Britain and the rest of the United Kingdom. They are not an "optional extra," for the reasons described by Respect (2012: 2):

Organisations running a DVPP without an ISS cannot be considered for accreditation as they are unsafe and cannot achieve the standard. An ISS is an essential feature of a Respect accredited Domestic Violence Prevention Service, for many reasons. An ISS helps to ensure that women's expectations of the DVPP are based on realistic expectations and that they and others do not rely solely on the service to bring about an immediate cessation of violence and abuse. It helps to ensure that women's safety can be monitored and kept the highest priority. It also helps to ensure that work with the men attending the program is informed by current understanding of the women's experiences. It is now widely accepted that working with perpetrators of DV can only be undertaken safely if there is an ISS that contacts partners and ex-partners and provides them with a support service.

British programs vary and are constantly developing, but often take an approach which combines techniques from cognitive behavioral and other therapeutic interventions with awareness raising and educational activities, usually using an understanding of DV which is pro-feminist and based on research evidence about the nature of DV. Most consist of weekly group-work sessions which aim to educate men about how to eliminate their use of violent, abusive, and controlling behaviors and promote the value of gender-equal relationships. Such programs are now widespread within the criminal justice field (through probation for men mandated by the criminal courts) but community-based/non-criminal justice programs (for men mandated by family courts, child protection, or self- or partner-mandated) remain sparse. All of the British non-criminal justice programs that we

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are aware of are for male heterosexual perpetrators, with no group work available for gay men, lesbian or heterosexual women, or transsexual men and women. As far as we know, only London has specifically developed group-work programs for ethnic-minority men (Rehman *et al.* 2013).

This shortage of programs is linked to a lack of clarity about whether perpetrator programs "work." In the UK there have been two published evaluations of community-based programs (Dobash *et al.* 2000; Burton *et al.* 1998). While both showed program effects, they were largely based on criminal court-mandated men (who previously attended community programs before the expansion of criminal-justice-led programs) and the evaluations had methodological limitations.

In the United States, two contradictory sets of findings are put forward. The first claims to have found a program effect (largely through the work of Gondolf, see for example, 2004) and the second claims there is no program effect (largely through the work of Dutton, see for example, 2006). None of these studies has been accepted universally in the UK as providing evidence as to whether perpetrator programs "work" or not. In addition, most of the studies conducted in the US have also relied on court-mandated research participants and had other methodological limitations. The findings cannot be easily translated to the UK because of the different community contexts. Finally, the UK community-based programs are required to have associated women's support projects that make proactive contact with all partners and ex-partners of program men, and their work has expanded into undertaking risk and case management as part of multi-agency responses. Neither was generally the case in the projects taking part in the research done in the US. It is this expansion of the work of DVPPs which led us to place them more centrally within coordinated community responses in our research, asking what they contribute to overall responses to DV.

Beyond "no more violence" or "completion"

As part of the Project Mirabal pilot study, we sought to understand how funders/commissioners, project staff (group-work facilitators, women's support workers and managers), victim-survivors, and perpetrators who were on or had been on programs understood success. We conducted a total of 73 semi-structured interviews from five DVPPs across England and Scotland in 2009–10. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that the stated aim of many programs was to increase the safety of women and children, "no more violence" emerged strongly as a score outcome for funders, commissioners, some program staff, and wider community partners.

For the women we interviewed, though, "success" meant far more than just "ending the violence." They knew physical violence might stop, but unhealthy atmospheres laden with tension and threat could remain.

Project staff felt that success was seen by funders and commissioners predominantly as program completion, which they saw as an unhelpful oversimplification of their intervention.

I think funders view success as how many bums on seats there are. How many people get through a program, you know, how many sort of completed. How fast you can churn people through a sausage machine really.

(Program worker)

Others described the broad net of change that could happen if even one man changed his behavior.

I'm aware of one family, just one guy changes radically here, it's not just him and his partner and his kids, there's all the people who have connections with them, that's a wide circumference of people that are affected. So, although we don't . . . you know, we've only run two groups and we get maybe eight, nine, ten guys through in a 12-month period, because the program's longer than 12 months, that's how many men we get. I mean there's a lot of people involved there, there's a lot of people, that's not just eight or nine, you're talking . . . when you've added the partners, ex-partners, children, stepchildren, larger family when they're involved, it's about 70 or 80 people very likely.

(Program worker)

As part of Project Mirabal we conducted lengthy, in-depth interviews with men who were enrolled in the programs at the beginning of their participation, at the point they drop out (if relevant), and at the end point of the program. We also conducted interviews with the (ex-)partners of enrolled men at the start and end points. At the time of writing we are still analyzing these interviews; however, it is clear that some men who attended all sessions and "successfully completed" the program have failed to make significant changes in their behavior, whereas some men who failed to complete the program have been able to make at least marginal changes. Two examples are given in the boxes below.

In the first example, Steve reports changes and insights which likely led to fairly significant improvements for his ex-partner and their child, despite not completing the program. In contrast, Tony would be able to tick both the "completed" and the "no more violence" boxes, while using the program learning in problematic ways and continuing to micro-manage Sandra's everyday activities in a way that creates a tense, fearful, and controlling atmosphere. There will undoubtedly be examples that show the opposite to be the case—where completers make more changes than those who leave the program. But we use these two examples above to illustrate the problematic nature of equating either "completion" or "no more violence" with "success."

The place of domestic violence perpetrator programs

Throughout our evaluation, we have heard broad statements such as those that open this chapter. This was evident in our pilot study where program staff were very aware that their service was often not seen as a "popular one."

BOX 1. E

Steve (pseudonym) with a history of domestic violence (pseudonym) confrontation place and child. It was recorded in the program and facilitated, and he had to travel to the control to get the program the

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BOX 1. EXAMPLE OF NON-COMPLETER

Steve (pseudonym) is a white man in his 40s based in Northern England with a history of DV and police involvement. He was involved with Sarah (pseudonym) for 1.5 years and they had a son together. Following a violent confrontation in public in front of their son, a restraining order was put in place and child contact was stopped. When contact proceedings re-started it was recommended that Steve attend a DVPP. He completed half the program and was not permitted to continue, due to conflict with one of the facilitators, alongside financial problems which he reported made it difficult to travel to the group. Steve gave an example of where he would have used control to get his own way before attending the program, but following the program the couple had their first Christmas without a fight or argument.

Yeah at times let's say when it's been around Christmas times, I've badgered her to bring him round and she hasn't and it's ended up in violence [. . .] [This Christmas] . . . I didn't . . . expect her to bring him round because obviously she's got the family going round there and all that kind of thing, so what's the point in me saying "Right I want you to bring him round on Christmas Day or Boxing Day" when I know really it is a totally unreasonable request. [. . .] Before I was expecting Sarah to drop everything to bring Harry to me or whatever . . . and I didn't even care whether it was an unreasonable thing to do, I didn't care about how she felt or what she thought . . . but like now, I say, Christmas I didn't even ask, the only thing I did ask was "Look can you make sure Harry after he's opened his presents, make sure he rings me on Christmas day?" and she went "Yeah not a problem" [. . .] that probably would have been, apart from when Harry was probably 1 years old, that's one of the first Christmases where me and Sarah didn't have a fight or an argument.

I think there are still significant numbers of people out there working in social care who as far as perpetrators are concerned it's all "prosecute, bang them up, and throw away the key."

(DVVP Service worker)

This inclination is perplexing, since many of these individuals would be critical of right-wing penal policies in general. As Lewis and colleagues (2001) highlighted, the idea that the law is a deterrent to DV offenders is one that is often supported with insufficient questioning or consideration of other modes of intervention. They argue that feminists on the left are generally very mindful of offenders' civil liberties, except when considering men who commit offenses against women and children.

BOX 2. EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETER

Sandra (pseudonym) is a white woman in her 40s living in the South of England with her husband Tony (pseudonym) and her two teenage children from a previous relationship. Two years into their relationship a neighbor overheard a dispute and rang the police. They went to Relate For Couples counseling, where staff advised that Tony should attend the DVPP. Although Tony went on to complete the program, Sandra gave examples of his ongoing control and micro-management of her household work:

Probably there has been an improvement there, but he'll still make his opinions known, but he'll add at the end of it now, "But I'm not allowed to say that, or think that." [. . .] Erm, he lost it Tuesday morning [. . .] I'd swept the kitchen floor. Now I sweep that kitchen floor about five times a day, and I'm not sure if I was on my own I'd do it that frequently to be honest, but I'm always paranoid that I don't want him to walk in there and see any crumbs on the floor. So I'd swept the kitchen floor, my daughters had got up that morning, had some cereal and as usual, as teenagers do, you know, tipped it into a bowl and some cereal had obviously gone over the top and some had spread on the floor, and yes it is careless and yes it's not great, but heigh-ho, that's life. Erm, and so he'd walked in, and he'd gone, "There's crumbs on the floor again. Can't you lot—don't you lot—don't—" and he starts, again in earshot of the children . . . and then I said, "Look I only swept it before we went to bed last night, you know, I'm in a rush to get to the train, but I'll—I'll sweep it before I go and, you know, I—or if I don't get to do it then I—I'll, you know, do it when I get back or whatever." And he—he was make—I think it was tuna sandwiches, and he—he'd like put his tuna into a bowl, erm, and he got this bowl of tuna and he threw it on the floor, and he went, "There!" he said, "I might as well do the same as your children. Just throw all the food on the floor." And then he just—then he throws the cup of tea, and then he walks out."

One strand of Project Mirabal involves interviewing staff employed at other organizations that comprise the Coordinated Community Response that DVPPs are situated within. In one of the areas in particular, this strong belief that the law and not perpetrator programs was the way forward was stated very strongly by two police officers.

I'm simply not convinced of its cost-effectiveness and I'm not convinced that on the majority of perpetrators that it works.

(Police officer)

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The officers said they were very unlikely to refer men to the DV perpetrator program, stating: "We refer people to jail, that's where they should be!" While this is a statement many, and arguably most, feminists would also make, it is, nonetheless, rhetoric rather than reality. The "tough on DV perpetrators" message has been voiced by many politicians, for example one minister who, when asked at a public meeting whether hostels should be opened for DV perpetrators to be ejected to (instead of women and children needing to leave their homes to go into shelters) and where they could take part in behavioral change work either individually or in groups, replied with just one sentence: "We already have hostels for violent men: They are called prisons."

Sending more men to prison for DV probably would send a powerful message out both individually and collectively to DV perpetrators. However, the problem with this argument is that: (a) It is not a solution, since many DV victim-survivors do not make a police report, and many of the behaviors that comprise the coercive control which is so destructive for women and children do not currently constitute crimes; (b) of those men who are arrested, a small proportion are prosecuted and hardly any receive custodial sentences (Hester 2006; Hester and Westmarland 2006); and, (c) sending someone to prison is an expensive option that does not necessarily change men's behavior, nor stop the violence. The reality is that prison, even for a short time, is an unlikely outcome for the vast majority of DV offenders.

Expanding our understandings of "success"

Through our pilot study interviews, we asked what the various stakeholders in DVPPs wanted to get out of programs. Some men were still participating in a program and were talking about their hopes, and others had already completed their program. Some of the female (ex-)partners had separated, others were still living with their partners.

From the thematic analysis of the 73 interviews we developed six measures of success, which we explain below. These measures have provided the framework for the indicators of success that we have used to develop our survey and interview instruments within our full research study.³ In light of the previous discussion, it is crucial to note that the first two measures were more important to the victim-survivors we interviewed than ending violence.

1. *An improved relationship between men on programs and their (ex-)partners which is underpinned by respect and effective communication.*

Improved and respectful relationships encompassed changes in relation to (ex-)partners and children whether or not they continued living together as a family; indeed being able to accept separation and make the best of it was seen as being as "successful" as remaking relationships within the family. This was particularly the case where communication of one form or another was going to be ongoing for many years because of child contact. Having "honest" communication was mentioned regularly by the men, as was being

able to rebuild and sustain it in a context of broken trust. Many recognized that holding onto previous patterns was not an option if their hope of not losing their partner was to be an outcome of the program. One man, for example, explained that he had previously attended a number of anger management courses but that these had simply taught him to remove himself from the situation rather than to be able to openly and honestly communicate.

2. *For (ex-)partners to have an expanded "space for action" which empowers through restoring their voice and ability to make choices, while improving their wellbeing.*

For the female (ex-)partners, this meant no longer living with the shadow of fear, which in turn created space in which it was possible to think, act, and express themselves without being scared of what might happen. One woman put this succinctly as having the option of disagreeing about something that was important.

Basically the fact that if we argue, it doesn't end up with physical violence and that it can be a normal argument and I don't have to worry about my safety.

((Ex-)partner of DVPP participant)

Qualitative DV researchers have long documented the debilitating impacts it has on women's sense of self (see, for example, Hoff 1990; Kirkwood 1993), narrowing what Nordic researcher Eva Lundgren (2004) has termed their "life space," and Liz Kelly (2007) refers to as "space for action." Women talked about being able to enter the house without being scared, stay out late without feeling they would have to "walk on egg-shells" the next day, choose to spend time with family and friends without being challenged; all are examples of what we term "expanded space for action," and which chime with the limits on freedom that Evan Stark (2007) makes such a core component of the harms of coercive control.

3. *Safety and freedom from violence and abuse for women and children.*

Following Stark (2007), we refer here not just to safety but "freedom" from violence, in recognition that the reduction or cessation of violence and abuse overlapped with the previous two measures of success. The reduction or cessation of violence and abuse was discussed more often and more explicitly by men on programs than by the women (ex-)partners, undoubtedly in part because program content focuses on this. Many maintained they had already made this change. This was the measure of success most frequently mentioned by funders and commissioners, and it included the ability both to engage men who were not in contact with the criminal justice system and to enable safe child contact to take place. Safety/freedom from violence was also the most prominent for practitioners. This was generally linked to the stated goals of programs, and included both being and feeling safer for women and children. Most emphasized ending violence and abuse, with some offering a more

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able to rebuild and sustain it in a context of broken trust. Many recognized that holding onto previous patterns was not an option if their hope of not losing their partner was to be an outcome of the program. One man, for example, explained that he had previously attended a number of anger management courses but that these had simply taught him to remove himself from the situation rather than to be able to openly and honestly communicate.

2. *For (ex-)partners to have an expanded "space for action" which empowers through restoring their voice and ability to make choices, while improving their wellbeing.*

For the female (ex-)partners, this meant no longer living with the shadow of fear, which in turn created space in which it was possible to think, act, and express themselves without being scared of what might happen. One woman put this succinctly as having the option of disagreeing about something that was important.

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qualified reduction in violence or risk and others ending physical violence and reducing emotional abuse. The latter two possibly reflect a desire not to over-claim what programs could achieve. "Feeling safer" was sometimes expanded upon through phrases like "no longer living in fear." While the majority of practitioners were aiming for a total cessation of violence, a minority argued that less ambitious changes were more realistic:

At best, you know, no longer abusive, at worst that their abuse has significantly reduced.

(Practitioner)

Here we see a perspective where a range of changes in the same direction is considered by practitioners as positive.

4. *Safe, positive, and shared parenting.*

For the women (ex-)partners, positive parenting refers not only to the fact that children benefited from the changes noted above, but also that parenting the children together was enhanced, with family activities more frequent, men being more attentive to the needs of the children and/or access no longer something to be dreaded. For both current and ex-partners, being able to trust the man with the children played a significant part in this. More accurate multi-agency assessments, which included a report on the man's dangerousness and potential for change rather than relying solely on professional judgments about the woman's capacity to protect, were seen as important to some funders/commissioners.

The contribution programs could make to multi-agency risk management plans was emphasized. For example, a full assessment, which revealed the extent and length of abuse, can be fed into Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences or similar forums, family court proceedings, and shift the attitudes and interventions of partner agencies. In particular, detailed information on perpetrators had the potential to widen the focus from the victim and increase the emphasis on addressing the risks posed by the perpetrator.

5. *Enhanced awareness of self and others for men on programs, including an understanding of the impact that DV has had on their partners and children.*

Here we refer to an expanded understanding of what intimate partner violence consists of and its impact. For both women and men, recognition of what constitutes violence—or not—emerged as a consequence of being asked about its presence within relationships, in both risk assessment and safety planning processes. Some reflected on how the services had enabled them to reflect on previous misconceptions.

Well, before I went on the course if they'd have asked us that question [about DV being present in any other relationships], I would have said it didn't happen but . . . [I learned a] lot from the course that I went to . . .

It's little things that you don't realize at the time, [like] the shouting, the slamming doors, the banging things down, all that's in a way DV . . . but at the time I didn't realize it . . . I would say that [there have been other relationships where there has been DV].

(Program participant)

Awareness of self and others was a commonly cited desired outcome for men by practitioners, presumably reflecting that they believe this to be the foundation of not only choosing to change, but more importantly being able to maintain this after completing the program. The outcomes they were seeking here included: empathy; the ability to reflect on behavior and feelings; ability to "be in" relationships with others; taking responsibility for their actions and their impacts on others; willingness to seek help; ability to identify what they had changed and why it made a difference; and, capacity to name and discuss problematic behavior.

6. *For children, safer, healthier childhoods in which they feel heard and cared about.*

While to some extent this overlaps with indicator 4, here the focus is on the children themselves, rather than parenting. This was raised primarily by practitioners and funders/commissioners rather than by the women and men. For practitioners working in perpetrator programs, children's safety has become a more specific focus, both while living with the perpetrator and where child contact is an issue. This is in large part due to increased referrals from social work and Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS),⁴ and being commissioned to do risk assessments with respect to contact hearings. Again the notion of safety encompassed more than physical safety and encompassed: physical and emotional health and wellbeing; happiness; freedom from fear; and/or having to protect their mother or siblings. Some workers took the risks to children very seriously, making reference to decisions to remove perpetrators from the household if children "were terrified," and the importance of appropriate child contact decisions being made by the courts and other professionals.

Children's future relationships were a very strong theme for funders/commissioners, often linked to the ubiquitous, though strongly contested, cycle-of-abuse theory (that children who live with domestic abuse are more likely to be abusive/abused in their own future relationships). Some responses were more immediate and connected to the realities of the everyday lives of children and young people, referring to: knowing violence is wrong; improved and more stable peer relationships; for teenage boys, positive interactions with girlfriends; and, for teenage girls, seeking more equal relationships.

Our research tools that we are currently using in Project Mirabal—a qualitative interview schedule and a quantitative telephone survey—allow us to explore

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Our research tools that we are currently using in Project Mirabal—a qualitative interview schedule and a quantitative telephone survey—allow us to explore

changes on all six indicators, thus offering more nuanced measurements and assessments of DVPPs' success.

Reflections

In this chapter we have argued that measuring the success of DVPPs solely in terms of the notions of "completion" and "no more violence" are flawed in terms of what we know about the patterns and harm of DV, the work that DVPPs do, and the hopes and aspirations of victim-survivors. Having described two cases where "completion" and "lack of" did not equate with "no more violence" and "violence" respectively, we then critiqued the "law and order" approach put forward by some community partners and experienced by ourselves as academics while undertaking our current evaluation of British DVPPs through Project Mirabal. Instead, we suggest six more nuanced holistic indicators of success which reflect more accurately both the work of programs and what would make a difference in the lives of women and children.

Notes

- 1 For updates on Project Mirabal, see www.dur.ac.uk/criva/projectmirabal.
- 2 For more information, see Respect website, www.respect.uk.net.
- 3 For more information about these measures and an analysis of what this means for social work, see Westmarland and Kelly (2013).
- 4 CAFCASS combines family court welfare service, guardian *ad litem*, and other key functions where children come within the purview of the family court.

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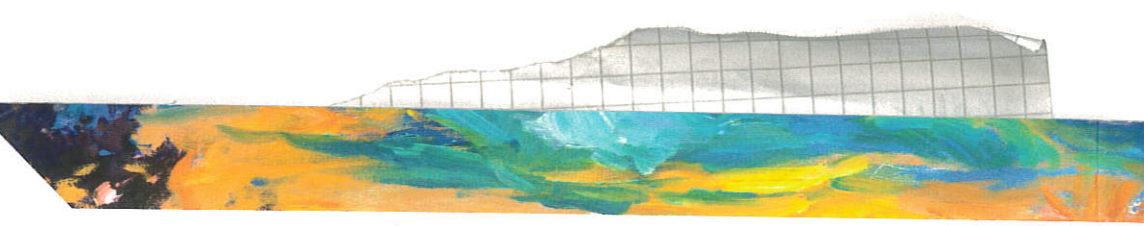
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Dr Miranda Horvath, Reader in Forensic Psychology and Deputy Director of Forensic Psychological Services, Middlesex University, UK

"... I recommend that... young scholars start here with this volume, and think creatively about how to move forward our initiatives and challenges to violence against women. In this volume researchers share their insight, the state of the art in thinking about confronting violence against women."

Professor Betsy Stanko OBE, Head of Evidence and Insight, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, London and Emeritus Professor of Criminology, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Violence against women is a global problem and despite a wealth of knowledge and inspiring action around the globe, it continues unabated. Bringing together the very best in international scholarship with a rich variety of pedagogical features, this innovative new textbook on violence against women is specifically designed to provoke debate, interrogate assumptions, and encourage critical thinking about this global issue.

This book presents a range of critical reflections on the strengths and limitations of responses to violent crimes against women and how they have evolved to date. Each section is introduced with an overview of a particular topic by an expert in the field, followed by thoughtful reflections by researchers, practitioners, or advocates that incorporate new research findings, a new initiative, or innovative ideas for reform. Themes covered include:

- advances in measurement of violence against women;
- justice system responses to intimate partner violence and sexual assault;
- victim crisis and advocacy;
- behavior change programs for abusers; and
- prevention of violence against women.

Each section is supplemented with learning objectives, critical thinking questions, and lists of further reading and resources to encourage discussion and to help students to appreciate the contested nature of policy. The innovative structure will bring debate alive in the classroom or seminar and makes the book perfect reading for courses on violence against women, gender and crime, victimology, and crime prevention.

Holly Johnson was principal investigator on Canada's first national survey on violence against women and co-investigator of the International Violence Against Women Survey, and is the author of numerous publications in this area.

Bonnie S. Fisher has authored numerous publications spanning the field of victimology, with emphasis on measurement issues, and recently served on the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault.

Véronique Jaquier is a violence against women researcher working in Switzerland and the United States.

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