



Background



Gender-based violence includes any act of aggression where the individual(s) committing the violence are motivated by

beliefs about gender. Beliefs about gender are socially and culturally situated understandings of how men and women should be (Russo and Pirlott, 2006).

Patriarchal beliefs are frequently considered to be at the root of gender-based violence (Kilmartin, 2001; APIIDV, 2011). Patriarchy is a social structure that creates a sex-based hierarchy in which heterosexual males are dominant and idealised. A power imbalance is created and violence is one way of maintaining it (APIIDV, 2011; Russo and Pirlott, 2006).

Traditionally, gender-based violence has been defined as violence perpetrated against women and girls because of their biological sex and corresponding gender roles (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2002). However, violence against sexual and gender minorities is also gender based violence (APIIDV, 2011). Gender based violence serves to subordinate these groups (APIIDV, 2001) and is part of a larger continuum of disrespect towards them (Kilmartin, 2001).

The violence can include any verbal, physical, or sexual act of aggression that causes harm and limits freedoms (Heise et al., 2002). It is committed by individuals of all genders but most commonly by males and people who fit society's norms. Gender based violence can be carried out by individuals or groups and by strangers or individuals well known to the victims (Russo and Pirlott, 2006).

Gender-based violence is motivated by power and control. When gender norms are perceived to be violated, violence is used to assert dominance (Heise et al., 2002; Russo and Pirlott, 2006). For example, gender-based violence may occur when a male feels that he is not as powerful as he should be, or when a person

disapproves of a transgendered individual due to conflicting views about what is proper (Russo and Pirlott, 2006).

Gender-based violence has negative consequences for both victims and society at large (Heise et al., 2002; Russo and Pirlott, 2006). Anthropologists have determined that cultures with no gender-based violence do exist, which suggests that change is possible (Heise et al., 2002).

Approaches to Dealing with Gender-Based Violence

Gendered violence can be understood as rooted in broader social, economic, and political contexts and institutions. By using a structural perspective like this, gendered violence becomes a public responsibility rather than a private, pathological condition. It is imperative to examine individual and interpersonal factors within political, economic, and social frameworks, in order to guide analysis, practice, and policy in response to gendered violence.

Weldon (2002) points out that in Sweden, addressing violence against women has been delayed because attending to the issue would highlight women's inequality and challenge the perception that women are equal to men in all areas of Swedish society. In Canada, with the neoliberalization of government, services and punitive program regulations have been cut back such that women are discouraged from leaving violent relationships (Todd and Lundy, 2006). Recent years have seen the decline or withdrawal of funding for women's organizations and programs which have traditionally advocated, through lobbying and research, for increased equality of women in all sectors of society (Bryden, 2010).

In order to deal with gendered violence it is important to examine and critique existing economic, social, and political structures while, at the same time, developing new strategies for social action and mobilizing alternative women's groups (Todd and Lundy, 2006). This will require an organized approach in opposing cutbacks to social welfare programs and services, and to forming groups who advocate for the equality of women in all areas of life. This challenge is not unlike

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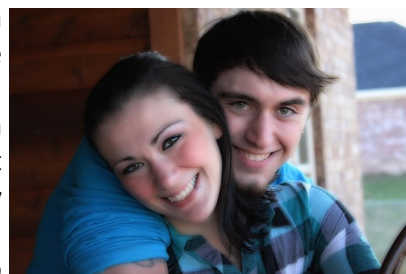
the ones feminists have organized against in previous decades.

Organizations and Initiatives Addressing Gender-Based Violence

In Canada, gender-based violence continues to be considered a serious social problem. Although rates of other forms of violent crime are falling, half of all Canadian women have experienced some form of gender-based violence since the age of sixteen (Canadian Women's Foundation [CWF], 2013). Additionally, 67 per cent of Canadians say they personally know at least one person who has been either physically or sexually assaulted (CWF, 2013). Although these statistics may seem quite high, it is important to acknowledge that actual rates of gender-based violence may indeed be higher as not all incidences of violence are reported (CWF, 2013).

There are many different gender-based violence initiatives within Edmonton that focus on all aspects of violence, including prevention, the culture surrounding gender-based violence, and counselling. Post-secondary institutions, such as the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan University, have prevention projects and counselling services on campuses to address the ongoing need for understanding what constitutes gender-based violence, and what can be done to help those who have encountered a violent situation. The

University of Alberta has created the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project, and Grant MacEwan University has created U-Solve. Both are designed to



educate students on how to achieve a violence-free campus, and on what the consequences of gender-based violence are for society as a whole.

Furthermore, counselling centres such as the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE) and Sexual Assault Voices of Edmonton (SAVE) are dedicated to empowering individuals who have been affected by gender-based violence to establish a firm position against violence. These organizations have also created campaigns to educate communities about gender-based violence, as well as what can be done to prevent further incidents from occurring. For example, SAVE created the "Don't be that Guy" campaign, which used posters depicting women in an unconscious state who were about to be assaulted.

All of these campaigns put the emphasis for responsibility of violence on the perpetrator instead of the victim.

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Contributing Volunteer Researchers: Anna Kessler, Aneesa Gill, and Hanna Nash



www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca
Suite 37, Commonwealth Building, 9912 - 106 Street
Tel: (780) 423-2031 Fax: (780) 425-6244 Email: info@edmontonsocialplanning.ca