

Justice and Community Responses on Intimate Partner Violence in Canada and Their Transferability in China

Dora M.Y. Tam, Ph.D

Abstract

Intimate partner violence refers to male violence against women in intimate relationships including violence committed by a husband, a common-law partner, an ex-husband, or an ex-common-law partner. The term “violence” in this paper “means any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women ...” (United Nations, 2006). The discussion on transferability in China focuses on mainland China where progressive development to address violence against women in China evolved after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Canada began developing its criminal justice and community responses to victims of intimate partner violence in the mid-1970s. The past 30 years have developed justice initiatives such as the amendment of the *Criminal Code* (1979 and 1983); the implementation of mandatory charging policies for the police; and the creation of specialized domestic violence courts. Parallel with the justice responses, Canada has developed considerable prevention and support programs for women, who are victims of intimate partner violence, and their children, and for men who abused their partners. Community responses include victim services, emergency shelters, counseling services, support groups, abusive partner intervention programs, preventive programs, public education, and the creation of the National Clearinghouse of Family Violence.

In mainland China (hereafter “China” is used), the term ‘domestic violence’ is used in official and unofficial communications in referring to violence against women in marital relationships. In China, violence against women is against the law and there are specified laws that are intended to protect women such as the Marriage Law and the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women. Community responses on domestic violence are largely taken care of by the All China Women’s Federation and the “neighborhood committees” under the Ministry of Civil Affairs. However, literature has documented the inadequacy of justice and community responses to prevent and intervene on intimate partner violence in China (Chen, 2007; Fu & Lei, 2007).

The author and her Canadian and Chinese research associates in collaboration with the Social Work Education and Research Center at Sun Yat-Sen University have conducted a community-based study on intimate partner violence against women in Guangzhou, China between July 2007 and Dec 2008. This paper will present experiences learnt from Canada and findings collected from the Guangzhou study and discuss the transferability of Canadian experiences of justice and community responses on intimate partner violence in China.