



ORTNER CENTER ON
VIOLENCE & ABUSE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Seed Grants Awarded 2009-2017

2017

Attachment Implications of Implementing Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ in Emergency Family Housing

*Katharine Wenocur
Social Welfare*

This study will identify benefits of incorporating therapy dogs into trauma-focused treatment for homeless children exposed to family violence. Family violence is one of the leading causes of child homelessness. Using a sample of children who have resided in a Mid-Atlantic homeless shelter for women and children in the past year, the study will recruit children who received Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ (AAPT) during their shelter stay. The study will use projective drawing techniques and qualitative interviews to explore the children's perceptions of the role of the therapy dog, as compared to the objective measurements of the children's progress in AAPT. Although there is an emerging evidence base for involving therapy dogs in trauma therapy to support attachment and developmental growth, few studies have addressed client's, particularly children's, perceptions of the therapy dog. The results of the proposed study will support evidence-based measurement of children's progress in AAPT, in understanding the experiences children exposed to violence, and on bridging barriers to engaging homeless children and families in trauma-focused treatment.

2016

Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and 30-Year Cardiovascular Risk among Young Adult Females in the United States

*Elizabeth Novack
Nursing*

A small but growing body of literature is examining the link between women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV) and cardiovascular disease (CVD). IPV has been associated with many negative health outcomes including mental health issues, stress and chronic disease, however the physiologic link between IPV and cardiovascular disease is not well understood. Some types of IPV victimization can be conceptualized as a chronic stressor impacting CVD development through direct pathways such as physical changes from chronic stress or indirect pathways such as adverse coping mechanisms like smoking or high alcohol use that are associated with IPV victimization and also increase risk for CVD. This study will fill the gap in

the literature by examining the connections between IPV and CVD risk by further assessing the possible direct or indirect pathways between IPV and CVD with mediators such as alcohol dependence, depressive symptoms, perceived stress and C-reactive protein levels among young adult women using a secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health).

Abuse by a relative with severe mental illness: Interviews with victims

Travis Labrum

Social Welfare

Despite the fact that approximately half of all violence perpetrated by persons with serious mental illness (SMI) is against family members, little research has been conducted in this area, with most such studies being limited to either describing the problem or empirically testing the relationship of a handful of factors with the occurrence of violence by this population. No study to date has examined the experiences and perceptions of victims of family violence by this population using qualitative methods. The purpose of the proposed study is to fill this gap. In particular, this study will examine the perceptions of victims regarding 1) the causes of family violence by this population, 2) the impacts that such violence has on victims, 3) how victims of family violence by this population have coped with violence, and 4) how policies and treatment practices can prevent such violence. Obtaining such information will greatly augment our understanding of this phenomenon and will guide future theory and research in this area. Such theory and research will likely enable the creation of more effective policies and practice interventions for preventing family violence by this population and for providing effective services to victims of such violence.

2015

Intimate partner violence via social media: women's experiences and police response

Lauren Ferreira Cardoso

Social Welfare

Social media use in the U.S. is on the rise among people of all ages and though these platforms offer endless opportunities for rewarding social connections, they have also emerged as a new site for gender-based violence against women, often perpetrated by an intimate or former intimate partner. Despite this shift, scant empirical inquiry has examined this phenomenon beyond the teen years. Nor has it considered police response to these types of crimes, though some evidence suggests that law enforcement may not take these crimes seriously. But research shows that online abuse is serious - it can cause a range of severe psychological repercussions and is often coupled with offline physical violence. Using data obtained from the Philadelphia Police Department containing all domestic violence reports from 2013, this study seeks to investigate how social media is used to perpetrate IPV, characteristics associated with this experience, and how police respond to these cases in comparison with similar cases perpetrated offline.

Police Intervention & Involuntary Commitment in Parent/Child Disputes

Rebecca Schut

Health & Societies

Disputes between children and parents are common. When these disputes require police intervention, however, we begin to see that the nature of this relationship can be much more complicated. Parent/child disputes are often discussed in literature from the side of abuse being perpetrated against the child by the parent, even though there are many other aspects of this relationship which are in need of examining. In this proposed project, we aim to look at the nature of parent/child disputes which are reported to the police. In order to do so, we will be looking at a few variables related to the type of dispute, (violent, verbal, etc.), violation of a Protection of Abuse or restraining order, custody dispute or violation, and drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, our secondary research topic involves the process of involuntary committal, "302". We are interested in looking at the types of disputes and circumstances which lead to the 302 committals, as well as the presence of a psychiatric disorder as classified by the DSM V, and its relationship to involuntary committal. For this project we will draw on data from 54,476 domestic violence cases provided to the Ortner Center by the Philadelphia Police Department.

Violence in Non-Spousal Former Intimate Partnerships

Devan Spear

Political Science

In North America, the prevailing wisdom about the victims of abusive partners is encouragement to leave. However, little information exists about the risks that leaving poses to these victims. Even more dangerously, we do not know if women risk abuse when they leave a partner who was never abusive during the relationship. While there is a substantial amount of researching examining the connection between relationship status and levels of intimate partner violence, very little information exists about the levels and types of violence perpetrated by non-spousal former intimate partners. Within research that examines former non-spousal intimate partnerships and levels of violence, most studies have done so through the lenses of divorce or stalking.

The goal of this project is to determine whether there is any variation in the risk of violence between former non-spousal intimate partnerships and former intimate partnerships. I will be using all intimate partner violence-related police reports from the City of Philadelphia from 2013 to extract data about relationship status, and type of violence perpetrated during each case. It is likely that this study will find some kind of connection between these two variables. Once the information about these police reports has been examined for patterns in relationship status and intimate partner violence, it has the potential to be extremely useful to the Philadelphia police department, as well as police departments in other large urban American cities.

2014

Family violence perpetrated by persons with severe mental illness

Travis Labrum

Social Welfare

Despite the fact that approximately half of all violence perpetrated by persons with severe mental illness targets family members, little research has been conducted in this area. In an effort to prevent family violence by persons with severe mental illness and its many consequences it is necessary that explanatory factors of family violence perpetrated by this population be adequately identified. The proposed study will collect data from family members of persons with severe mental illness via an online survey and such explanatory factors will be identified. It is expected that the results of the proposed study will be published and will provide direction and support for additional studies in this area.

How unemployment shapes family life

Aliya Hamid Rao

Sociology

Unemployment has been associated with increases in spousal abuse, depression and alcoholism. Conceptualizations of how unemployment shapes family life suggest that the mechanism leading from unemployment to negative impacts on the family are related to economic hardship as well as to the gendered male imperative to provide economically for the family. For men, the failure to provide has been viewed as a failure to fulfill gender roles, leading to increased violence at home. Yet, the past several decades have witnessed two important changes necessitating a new perspective on unemployment and its impacts on families. First, the world of work is rife with bouts of layoffs and downsizing such that unemployment is not quite the personal failure as it was in previous decades. Second, there has been a significant shift in men and women's roles at home and at work, with participation in both paid and unpaid labor converging. This indicates a shift from traditional to more egalitarian norms. To ask how unemployment shapes family life now, I use in-depth interviews and family observations with 50 dual-earner, professional families with dependent children, evenly split between cases where men have lost their job and where women have lost their job. I contend that unemployment is a gendered process, with families where women have lost their jobs having a less adverse experience than families where men have lost their jobs. While gender-differentiated, this experience will vary from the experiences of families in older studies when substantially disparate gender norms were common.

2013

Dental student and faculty perceived readiness to manage intimate partner violence victims

Maryam Akbari

Dentistry

With a 2020 Healthy People objective to reduce intimate partner violence, all parties that are involved in caring for either batterers or victims need to be trained.

Considering that 75% of physical trauma to victims is on the head and neck, dental professionals are in a unique position to identify and assist intimate partner violence victims. This study aims to measure the level of knowledge and skills among students and clinical faculty at Penn's School of Dental medicine. Validated survey items will be used to assess participants' knowledge and opinions in regard to managing intimate partner violence patients. If appropriate, results will be used to design an educational intervention.

Type of marital union and intimate partner violence

Angelina Ruffin
Social Welfare

Although the practice of polygamy is outlawed in most countries it is still practiced in over 800 societies worldwide. Research has found women in polygamous marriages to be at higher risk of psychological and health problems, and domestic violence than their monogamous counterparts. Studies report that women who believe wife beating can be justified may be at greater risk of continuous abuse than those who do not. This study will answer the questions: 1) Are there differences in women and men's attitudes towards wife beating according to their type of marital union, and 2) does marital type moderate men and women's attitudes towards wife beating, using Ghana as an example. This study aims to provide a better profile of women in polygamous relationships as well as identify potential risk factors for abuse. This study will have implications for policy makers, as they should be informed of the impact polygamous marriage has on women's health and risks for violence, so they may better target intervention programs to this population.

2012

An ethnography of the state, law, and sexual violence in Turkey

Tugce Ellialti
Sociology

In the last decade there have been unprecedented changes in laws and the legal system in Turkey. In the midst of a sea of gender-progressive legal transformations, however, results of a whole lot of recent sexual violence cases have been far from reflecting the expectations from new legal regulations, inciting a wide-range public discontent and criticism. Instigated by the seeming discrepancy between laws and their applications in practice, this in-depth, qualitative research seeks to a) explore how cases of sexual violence are handled and processed in the medico-legal institutions and courts in Turkey; b) to examine, from a gender perspective, how state institutions construct, mobilize, and reproduce the legal and medico-legal discourses and practices regarding sexual violence in this context. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and archival research, this study examines how state institutions address, manage, and respond to allegedly gender-progressive reforms in the legal domain. More specifically, it examines the categories, distinctions, and hierarchies that the state and state institutions produce while deciding: a) what acts of sexual violence are subject to legal punishment, and, b) who is entitled to what kind of protection, assistance, or legal redress. With a focus on the effects of the changed law on the legal processing of cases of sexual

violence, this research looks at the implications of institutionalized responses to violence against women for social justice and gender inequalities in general, and for women's search for legal redress and their access to citizenship rights in particular. Finally, it seeks to reopen the recent legal and institutional reforms to discussion for a reconsideration of gender equality in discourses and practices of citizenship in Turkey.

2011

Family communication: A protective factor for teen dating violence among economically disadvantaged adolescent girls

Julia Bohinski

Nursing

The most serious threats to the health and safety of adolescents are preventable. They result from risk-taking behaviors such as substance use/abuse, violence, suicide, and sexual activity rather than from illnesses. These threats extend to dating and romantic relationships, particularly for economically disadvantaged adolescent girls living in high-risk urban environments. The mental and physical health consequences associated with victimization are serious and can impede girls' healthy and safe development into adulthood. In addition, chronic illnesses associated with partner violence exposure in adulthood include arthritis, asthma, activity limitations, stroke, smoking, binge drinking, and even premature death. Families are the most influential force in the lives of children and adolescents. There is a growing body of evidence regarding the protective effects of family communication on adolescents' participation in risk behaviors. In addition, research indicates that mother-daughter communication is especially protective for low-income girls. The purpose of this quantitative cross-sectional study is to better understand the relationship between family communication and teen dating violence (TDV) victimization among economically disadvantaged, urban adolescent girls. The study's primary aim is to determine if family communication predicts TDV victimization. We hypothesize that girls who report more effective family communication will have lower rates of TDV victimization. An exploratory aim of the study is to determine the psychometric properties of the Mother-Daughter Dating Relationships Communication Scale. Additionally, the study will aim to describe mother-daughter communication about dating relationships and examine if such communication is associated with TDV victimization.

2010

For better or for worse? Campus newspaper coverage of sexual assault

Matt Amalfitano

Health & Societies (undergraduate)

Campus newspaper coverage may have an effect on survivors regardless of whether they reported their assault to campus authorities. This study assessed whether undergraduates perceive that campus newspaper coverage has an effect on rape reporting, and if so, how and to what extent. This study focused on one newspaper, the Daily Pennsylvanian, on one U.S. university campus, the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The project was completed using a

qualitative study design. Grounded theory analysis was used with two focus groups of undergraduates and three interviews of campus staff members. To the degree that the Daily Pennsylvanian represents other U.S. university campus newspapers, this study found that student newspaper coverage encourages undergraduate reporting, but some elements of coverage—particularly coverage of locations and the differences between stranger and acquaintance rapes—can be improved. These results could provide insight to campus newspapers when covering sexual assault cases at their respective schools.

**Somos hermanas del mismo dolor (we are sisters of the same pain):
Intimate partner sexual violence narratives among Mexican immigrant
women in Philadelphia**

Tiffany Dovydaitis Kim
Nursing

Intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV), any non-consensual or coerced sexual act perpetrated by one partner against another in an intimate relationship, is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes than physical violence alone. Immigrant Latinas in the US face an even higher burden related to IPSV due to a number of sociocultural, economic and political factors present in their lives.

Through the combined use of holistic content and holistic form narrative analysis methodologies, I examined IPSV in the lives of nine Mexican immigrant women living in Philadelphia. Although interview questions focused primarily on migration and IPSV, women shared broader personal stories of a lifetime of suffering. I identified three major themes and plot types present within participant narratives. Themes included *la Virgen y la Puta* (The Virgin and the Whore), *La Familia* (The Family), and *Avazar* (Getting Ahead). The virgin and the whore theme illuminated pervasive sociocultural beliefs surrounding the importance of virginity, and the consequences of being viewed as a whore after childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual violence. The family theme included two subthemes on past family abuse and the present importance of loving children and giving them a better life. The final theme, getting ahead, represented the women's efforts to move beyond their histories of suffering in order to live happier lives. Plot types further demonstrated the women's conceptualizations of their own stories of suffering. These included the life of enduring suffering, the life of striving against suffering, and the life of suffering left behind.

As the first study to specifically examine IPSV among immigrant Latinas in the US, this descriptive work adds valuable new knowledge to an area of science that is still not well understood, and provides important implications for researchers, and health and social service providers working with this population. Future work should include community-based interventions to address sexual violence across the lifespan on both sides of the US-Mexican border.

Developing Adolescent RADAR to screen for dating violence

Christine M. Forke

Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Adolescent dating violence (ADV) is common among teenagers and frequently is experienced during early or middle adolescence. Screening for ADV often does not occur in the healthcare setting, largely because providers are untrained on ADV and uncertain of appropriate questions to ask. The goal of this project is to develop a brief, standardized screening tool to assess for ADV by soliciting data from the experts – adolescent health specialists, national ADV experts, and adolescents – using a multi-stage web-survey based on the Delphi Technique. The goal of the Delphi Technique is to allow “experts” to brainstorm ideas and then, through an iterative process, refine ideas and arrive at consensus. Because the Delphi allows for anonymous idea generation, it has advantages over other group methods where group dynamics and personalities can impact the results. Using a three-stage Delphi survey, we will ask adolescent health specialists and ADV experts to identify the questions they have found most successful at identifying ADV (Stage 1) and then to refine, rate, and rank the identified questions in successive stages (Stages 2 and 3). In a subsequent phase of the project, the questions generated by adolescent health specialists and ADV experts will be presented to adolescents for refinement of terminology and context. In this way, we will develop an empirically-based screening tool with teen-centered, culturally appropriate and respectful questions. Future funding will be solicited for a multi-site study where we implement the screener and evaluate the validity and effectiveness of the newly-developed tool.

2009

Women's experiences of strangulation in intimate partner relationships

Manisha Joshi

Social Welfare

Strangulation is a unique and particularly pernicious form of intimate partner violence. To increase the relatively little that is known about strangulation survivors, focus groups and interviews were conducted as part of a practice-research engagement with a battered women's shelter. The specific goals were to examine women's perceptions about the seriousness of strangulation, use of the terms “choking” and “strangling,” descriptions of health effects, and interactions with the healthcare system. Most of the women had been strangled and, among them, almost all were strangled multiple times. The loss of consciousness was common. They associated “choking” with use of body parts and “strangling” with use of objects. Although some minimized the assault, most considered strangulation to be serious and reported a variety of medical conditions associated with the assault. Of the few who sought medical care for their symptoms, few disclosed the assault to a provider or had a provider ask about strangulation which commonly resulted in misdirected treatment.