

# **Women Survivors of Sexual Violence and Partner Abuse: Exploring Transformative Learning through Social Action Participation**

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# Outline

- ◆ **Context**
- ◆ **Identifying the Gap**
- ◆ **Research Project**
- ◆ **Themes**
- ◆ **Emerging Issues**
- ◆ **Recommendations**

# **Violence Against Women**

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

United Nations, 1993

# Adult Education: Identifying the Gap

- Adult educators are usually social activists who challenge learners and systems about justice issues

(Friere, 1970; Lange, 2009; Mezirow, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2008; Taylor, 2009; & Tisdell, 1998, and others)

- Yet very few adult educators talk about violence against women

(hooks, 2000; Horsmann, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 2005; Price, 2005; Stalker, 2005).

# Research Project

## **Goals:**

- Explore survivors' experiences
- Engage communities in change

## **Guiding Principle:**

- Survivors' experiences and voices are valued as experts

# Survivors' Advisory Councils

- Survivors who come together to improve services for victims of sexual violence and partner abuse.
- Engage with local coordinating committees and community agencies

# Methodology

- ✓ Qualitative
- ✓ Critical ethnography
- ✓ Lens of feminist theory
- ✓ Transformative learning theories

# Research Project

- ◆ Individual interviews with Council members and key informant
- ◆ Reviewed preliminary findings with Council members and key informant
- ◆ Presented preliminary findings to new focus group of self-disclosed survivors
- ◆ Will present at community forums with the final results



# Themes

- 1. Healing**
- 2. Significant Learning**
- 3. Personal Transformation through Social Action**
- 4. Council as Social Action & Support Group**
- 5. Lived Experience of Violence**
- 6. Key Systemic Barriers**
- 7. Key Systemic Solutions**
- 8. Historical Context**

# Healing

**Wanting to help other victims**

“After 20 years of abuse, if I could help just one person, it would be worth it.”

Olivia

# Significant Learning

## Knowledge & Information

1. Did the Council members learn anything from being on the Council?
2. Did the service providers Councils presented to learn anything?

# **Personal Transformation through Social Action**

**“I think the Council has helped me to change, and to accept that this is the way my life is right now, but there are some other things that I can do ... I think I’m less scared of him now. That fear is not as bad as it was. I mean, if I saw him in the street, I’d still bolt. .... I think I’m stronger in that emotional sense, that he hasn’t got the grip on me that he had before.”**

**Olivia**

# **Council as Social Action and Support Group**

**Biggest Challenge: Balancing the dual role of Council as a social action group AND/OR a support group**

**“I think having that external goal [of changing the system] as opposed to just being focused totally on ourselves was very beneficial.”**

**Virginia**

# Lived Experience of Violence

## Grounds the work of Council

“The lived experience, and the experience we [had] going through the systems, that’s our expertise that we bring with us.”

Olivia

# Key Systemic Barriers

Justice Sector, Law Enforcement  
& Child Welfare

“I would love to see the court system changed so that nobody has to go through [what] I went through.”

Samantha

# Key Systemic Solutions

- **Education as a primary tool for systemic change**

“I think [survivors’ knowledge] has to go into the educational system ... into general knowledge, incorporate it into the psychology, the social, the economic [systems], etc.”

Cinderella



# Historical Context

“[In the 1970s & 80s] we were fighting against invisibility, and [being told] you’re making this up and you’re lying. What we’re up against [now] is: Would you like to come and tell us a little bit about your experience? And now we’re going to have a little discussion about a funding proposal and you’re going to leave. Now we’re going to decide what programs are needed in this community. Thanks very much for your input.”

Key Informant

# Emerging Issues

- (Re)Engaging survivors as leaders in the sector
- Ensuring Councils/survivors offer substantial direction in service provision and policy direction
- (Re)Solving complex marginalizations & power/privilege issues

## **Recommendations**

1. Survivors' Advisory Councils
2. VAW Sector
3. Adult Education Sector

# **Survivors' Advisory Councils**

- ✓ **Link with other Councils**
- ✓ **Partner with Coordinating Committees**
- ✓ **Ensure funding for equity**
- ✓ **Continue to focus on education**
- ✓ **Demand involvement at the policy level**
- ✓ **Increase awareness of and sensitivity to how class, race, ability, etc. affects Councils**

# **VAW Sector**

- ✓ **Increase recognition of the expertise of survivors in a variety of ways (i.e. funding, support, etc.)**
- ✓ **Create forums for input from Councils on education, service provision, and policy development**
- ✓ **Increase critical dialogue, self-reflection and transformative learning**
- ✓ **“Heat in the Street”:** Continue to engage in social action to reduce violence against women

# Adult Education Sector

- ✓ **Create an open learning environment where VAW is named as common (Horsman, 1999)**  
[www.learningandviolence.net](http://www.learningandviolence.net)
- ✓ **Respond more effectively to learners who are survivors**
- ✓ **Engage in social action to reduce violence against women**
- ✓ **Build more connections between sectors**

**“I think being a survivor ... is key [to making change]. You know it’s easy for people to listen to what you’re saying, but when they know that this has happened to you, they’re [really] going to listen. It’s not just somebody blabbing away about statistics or whatever else. I think the fact that I share my story and my experiences, and personalize it, I think that is huge to making any kind of change, or impact, on somebody. I think that’s key.”**

**Samantha**

# Websites

- <http://www.learningandviolence.net/>
- <http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/en/index.html>
- <http://www.breakthrough.tv/learn/issue/violence-against-women>
- <http://www.springtideresources.org/>
- <http://www.crvawc.ca/>
- <http://library.nald.ca/item/4366>