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From Domestic Violence to Sustainable Employment

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Abstract

International research has found that domestic violence is a significant barrier to accessing and sustaining work (Lloyd and Taluc 1999, 385; Browne et al. 1999, 398).

In the Australian context, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reports that between 6 and 9 per cent of Australian women aged 18 and over are physically assaulted each year and that more than half of all women in Australia experience sexual or physical violence across their adult lifetime. Such behaviour has been estimated to cost $8.1 billion, of which $4.4 billion is estimated to be borne by the victims themselves, $1.2 billion by the general community and smaller amounts by friends and family and various levels of government (Access Economics 2004). This assessment underestimates the costs of domestic violence in terms of the inability of those who have experienced domestic violence to move into and secure sustainable employment options.

Despite these statistics there is a dearth of Australian research focussing on the link between domestic violence and its impact on long-term sustainable employment for those who have been subjected to such violence.

This paper explores the issue of domestic violence and access to work opportunities. In so doing, it links the work of Gianakos (1999) and her Career Development theory with that of Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Career Theory to develop a framework which would provide a pathway to enable those who have suffered domestic violence to achieve sustainable employment and economic independence.

Introduction

Domestic violence is acknowledged as a significant issue within Australia. Current figures suggest that almost a quarter (23%) of women who have been married or in a de facto relationship will report intimate partner violence each year, while further studies suggest that almost half of all Australian women will experience violence in their lifetime (ABS 1996). While acknowledging the cost to the individual, there has also been a small body of research which is beginning to recognise the consequential costs to governments, whose expenditures are enlarged by responding to the consequences of such violence. The impact of the global financial crisis has meant that governments have had to find savings in their expenditures and have begun to examine the costs of domestic and family violence to the community as a whole.

Much of the current research on domestic violence continues to focus on its causes and consequences, particularly short-term crisis intervention including provision of accommodation, welfare assistance and other emergency support and advocacy services (Costello et al. 2005, 254). This paper moves from such a concentration on immediate needs to exploring a more extended framework by which attention is given to the importance of

long-term planning in areas such as job search and career development. Such a scaffold will not only offer individuals an opportunity for long-term independence, but also provides governments with a measure by which overall expenditure can be reduced as more people enter the workforce. In so doing, this project responds to the challenge identified in the work of Phillips (2006) that there is a need for a more long-term integrated approach to the issue of domestic violence in Australia.

First, this paper places the issue of the costs of domestic violence in both an Australian and international context. Second, it examines the impact of domestic violence on individuals, and third it explores the work of Bandura (1989) and Gianakos (1999) to understand career orientation. Finally, by drawing on these concepts builds a framework which provides a pathway for domestic violence victims to attain sustainable employment and independence.

Costs of domestic violence

In Australia, domestic violence has been defined as:

> '...an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in a relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other'. (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2000, 2).

Whilst this definition is not gender specific it is recognised that in the large majority of cases the offender is male and the victim is female (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001, 7). Throughout this paper the term domestic violence refers to abuse by men, directed at women, within intimate partner relationships.

Australia was one of the first countries to attempt to calculate the economic costs of domestic violence with studies in the mid 1980s. In an overview of these studies, Laing (2001, 10) points out that it is only the direct costs which can be quantified and that no study had monetised the "debilitating and terrifying impacts of domestic violence on the lives of women and children." An indication of the magnitude of the problem in Australia is found in the work of Access Economics (2004). They estimate the total annual cost of domestic violence in Australia in 2002–03 (the last time such figures were available) to be $8.1 billion (Access Economics 2004, VII). Pain, suffering and premature mortality accounted for $3.5 billion and $2.5 billion was consumed by lost household economies of scale. The enormity of the cost to individuals is reflected not only in their pain, but also the fact that they bore the financial burden of approximately $4 billion themselves. A further $1.2 billion was expended by governments in providing crisis support. Children carried costs of $769 million, community groups $1,190 million, and employers $175 million. Such costs are also found internationally.

In Great Britain, Walby (2004, 2) has established that domestic violence "drains the resources of the public and voluntary services and of employers." Further, the estimated cost is around £23 billion per year with victims enduring not only the human and emotional costs but also an amount of £19 billion while the state bears £2.9 billion in extra service costs. Walby (2004, 3) suggests that by estimating the cost of domestic violence on individuals and

society, policy-makers may be moved to policy action as the price of inaction continues to escalate.

World Health Organization (WHO) figures reinforce the view that 'interpersonal violence is expensive' (2004). The USA spends $42 billion (NCADV, 2007) on direct services for intimate partner violence and no cost estimate has been made of the almost eight million days of paid work that are lost because of violence. Studies in the USA (Lyon 2000; Tolman and Raphael 2000) also show that somewhere between 50–60 per cent of women receiving welfare have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner compared to 22 per cent of the general population. The persistence of such violence continues to preclude many women from entering the workforce and thus they continue to be dependent on government funding.

The WHO posits "given the overwhelming evidence of the high cost of interpersonal violence, detailed analysis of the economic feasibility of interventions is a research priority" (2004). This research project takes up the call by the WHO to develop a suite of interventions to prevent the high financial and personal costs of domestic violence.

The Impact of domestic violence

Domestic violence is particularly debilitating for women because it denies them resources and this can have deleterious consequences for their health and well-being and lead them into poverty. The interconnectedness of partner violence, poverty, welfare and homelessness has been a focus of research since the 1990s (Johnson and Ferraro 2000, 958). While domestic violence is present at all socio-economic status, it tends to be more frequent and severe for poorer women (Hotaling and Sugarman 1990). Such violence inhibits the attempts by women to achieve social and economic success (Zorca 1991). While this research was undertaken in the USA, similar findings have emerged in Australia (Chung et al. 2000; Wensing et al. 2003). Women who leave abusive situations find themselves homeless and vulnerable.

In the most recent study of Australian disadvantage, Saunders and his team (Saunders et al. 2007, 90-91) has found that a constant theme to emerge was the very serious range of problems faced by those on welfare, noting the severity of the circumstances in which many people find themselves and the need for adequate resources and long-term solutions to be explored. Saunders et al. (2007) also found a lack of economic resources as a major cause of both deprivation and exclusion. Such views are echoed in the work of Schechter (2000, 9) when she argues that without adequate resources poor women simply cannot be safe. What should be disquieting for policy makers are the findings that poverty not only makes violence against women more likely to happen (Strauss and Gelles 1990) but that the consequences for such behaviours can be long-term and intergenerational. Poverty can also exacerbate the cycle of violence because of women's economic dependence on abusive partners (Kurz 1998). For many women violence then may be the precipitating factor for poverty which can lead to disempowerment and the resultant issues that impede a safe and secure life and require government support.

Intimate partner abuse has the potential to cause or lead directly to detrimental health outcomes for women and their children (Branigan 2007). The 2004 report by the Victorian State Government (DHS and Vic Health 2004) measured the burden of disease caused by

intimate partner violence. They established that intimate partner violence was the highest risk factor for women aged 15–44 for depression (33%), anxiety (26%), suicide (13%), tobacco (10%), alcohol (6%) and related diseases. In Australia, health costs were estimated to be $388 million for the year 2002–03 (Access Economics 2004). This decline into poverty and poor health has long-term outcomes for the individual women and their children as well as the community. Professor Wolfe's work (2010) found that in Australia the proportion of people reporting poor or fair health is far higher among those Australians with lower household income. This echoes work of Deaton and Paxson (1998) from USA and Canada who noted that "there is a well documented but poorly understood gradient linking socio-economic status with a wide range of health outcomes". In their work on hospital use in Western Australia, Moorin and D'Arcy Holman (2006) found that the largest inequity appears to be related to socio-economic status. Tied to the whole question of poverty and health is the issue of health literacy and people's ability to act on the care information whether it be the purchase of particular drugs or consumption of nutritious food. Many victims of abuse report that they are denied money to buy medicines, sanitary products and even food (Branigan 2007).

In the short-term this means women are not able to access work or maintain it, children are sick and unable to attend school. The physical and financial costs of such ill health preclude these women and their children from participating fully in the community and reaching their potential. Of particular concern is the fact that poor health in childhood is likely to have long-term consequences. Those children in poorer families fall into poorer health as they age and become unable to accumulate other forms of human capital such as education (Case et al. 2002; Currie and Stabile 2003). Hence the impact of intimate partner violence and its ensuing poverty and ill health persist and accumulate over time unless there is intervention.

Poverty and employment have been at the forefront of economic and social policy debate in Australia for the last three decades (Saunders 2006). Domestic violence victims not only suffer from a range of physical and mental health problems, but are more likely to have been unemployed in the past and also have higher levels of job turnover (Lloyd and Taluc 1999; Costello et al. 2005). Some work in the USA suggests that women who had experienced aggression from male partners had only one third the odds of maintaining employment for at least 30 hours per week over a six month period (Browne et al. 1999). While some abusers simply prohibit their female partners from working, others take measures to undermine any attempts at employment such as denying them transportation, tearing up clothing, beating them before job interviews and generally demoralising the partner to such an extent that work becomes impossible (Brandwein 1998; Lloyd and Taluc 1999). Such women then have more interrupted work histories, are less likely to seek or achieve promotion and often operate in low paid/low skilled work (Costello, Chung and Carson 2005: Lloyd and Taluc 1999).

In the Australian context unemployment or joblessness as it is now known continues to be the perennial cause of poverty (Saunders 2006). However, there is a lack of Australian research on the links of domestic violence and employment, but what limited work there is has found that training and employment transition services were considered a low priority even though the financial, social and emotional benefits of such interventions were

considered significant (Costello et al. 2005, 257). This is very different from Britain and Ireland where the issue of poverty and joblessness has been addressed in a comprehensive way with the setting of anti-poverty targets and long-term solutions (ACOSS 2004).

Domestic violence, no matter whether it be physical, emotional, verbal, economic or social, leads to lower self-esteem and self worth, social isolation, poverty and welfare dependency and poor health for the women and children who are subjected to such abuse (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001, 7; Tolman and Wang 2005, 148). They find they are unable to set short-term goals, have limited information through their social and economic isolation and exist in a climate of fear and these become barriers to seeking full employment and becoming financially independent (Trent and Margulies 2007).

Government intervention and long-term planning is essential to break the nexus between domestic violence victims and poverty. Sustainable employment is essential for victims to become economically self-sufficient and leave abusive relationships. (Browne et al. 1999, 420; Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 419; Lloyd and Taluc 1997, 1999). This aligns with the view that a full-time job is needed to produce sufficient income to raise people from poverty (Saunders 2006) and that job training and career planning, emphasising both short-term and longer-term employment, is of utmost importance to women who have suffered domestic violence and continue to struggle financially on government welfare.

A study of entry-level jobs in the labour market indicated that employment can only produce true economic independence when these positions are sustainable and lead to long-term careers with progressively higher salaries (Browne et al. 1999, 420). An obvious benefit of sustainable employment for victims of domestic violence is financial stability. Such permanent and regular income for women who have previously been victims of abuse can lead to their being able to achieve economic independence, while at the same time enjoying social inclusion, increased self esteem, confidence and efficacy for themselves and their children (Costello et al. 2005, 256). Hence it is vital that long-term career and education opportunities be brought to the forefront in order for domestic violence victims to achieve sustainable employment and long-term economic independence—not only for themselves but for their children and for the benefit of the wider community (Chronister and McWhirter 2003).

Theoretical framework

Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in processes by which human agency is exercised. People make causal contributions to their own functions and beliefs which affects the way in which they live their lives. Research (Betz 2000, 2004) now indicates that self-efficacy expectations do in fact significantly influence career choices, performance and persistence. Thus Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), as developed by Bandura (1989), has been applied to career counselling for women college students (Betz and Luzzo 1996), people of colour (Flores and O'Brien 2002), people with disabilities (Luzzo et al. 1999), female offenders (Chartrand and Rose 1996) and also preparing women to leave abusive relationships (Morris et al. 2009).

SCCT based upon Bandura's theory focuses on several cognitive-person variables—self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals—and how these variables interact with other

aspects of a person's environment (Wood and Bandura 1989) to shape their interests and actions.

Self-efficacy, a person's belief in her ability to accomplish a specific task or reach a specific goal is central to SCCT (Morris et al. 2009). Self-beliefs are perceptions an individual has about herself, abilities, limitations and potential. They affect the extent to which an individual may achieve success or experience failure. Such self-judgement will also influence the way in which an individual will view themselves. For those who believe they are inefficacious, this becomes self-fulfilling and creates stress which often leads to failure (Walker 2004). While a woman may have the desired skill level to achieve, she must also possess a resilient self-belief in her own capability levels of accomplishing a set goal (Wood and Bandura 1989, 364). Hence, a person with the same knowledge and skills may perform poorly, adequately or extraordinarily depending on fluctuations in self-efficacy thinking (Bandura 1993). Thus self-efficacy beliefs shape outcomes people expect their efforts to produce. Those of high efficacy expect to realise favourable outcomes while those of low efficacy expect their efforts to bring poor outcomes. People of low self-efficacy are easily convinced of the futility of their efforts in the face of difficulties, but those of high self-efficacy view impediments as surmountable and persevere to their goal (Bandura 2004). Put simply, high self-efficacy enables a person to approach their situation in a realistic manner and make an assessment of what is actually happening.

Many women who suffer intimate partner violence have low self-efficacy. This is often manifested by the use of avoidance or the excusing of the abuser's behaviour (Barnett and La Violette 1993) by minimizing the brutality they and their children endure (Herbert et al. 1991) and making personal attributions for the abuse (Herbert et al. 1991). Over time, these women believe that no matter what they do the outcomes remain the same and they continue to devalue their worth and competence.

Women living within domestic violence situations often do not have access to experiences that enable them to enhance self-efficacy, thus opportunities to undertake and succeed in the education or career arena may be seriously limited (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 419). Physical, emotional, social and economic abuse can all result in a decreased self-efficacy for domestic violence victims, thus decreasing their ability to perform job tasks successfully, accomplish training or educational goals and subsequently achieve employment, particularly long-term employment (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 419; Wood and Bandura 1989, 365).

Clarifying one's goals and values arises from developmental experiences in which persons come to believe that personal actions determine outcomes (Bandura 1997) It is suggested that a battered woman's expectations of education and career pursuits is strongly influenced by the actions of her abuser (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 420). An abuser may undertake activities that limit a woman's ability to undertake work activities or educational activities consistently and reliably, thus not only restricting their immediate pursuits but also lowering their self-efficacy and expected outcomes for future pursuits (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 420). Individuals with a weak self-belief are often not resilient to adversity, thus when faced with negative experiences readily disbelieve their own capabilities. This low self-efficacy can create a cycle of disbelief resulting in lower outcome expectations as well as fewer and less persistent attempts to actively pursue long-term career

goals (Wood and Bandura 1989, 366; Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 420). For victims of domestic violence negative outcome expectations may be fear of losing shelter and financial support, familial disapproval and failure of relationships (Morris et al. 2009). Further, there is a key issue of information for battered women—many of whom operate in isolation and have limited access to services and knowledge on which to draw to elucidate goals (Gianakos 1999). Research suggests that without exception, women who began connecting with their peers as part of an intervention strategy were able to develop skills in a safe context and this led to their ability to raise self-efficacy and hence their expectations of their potential and set goals (Gianakos 1999). Conversely women who remain in relationships with abusers become more dependent and fearful and their self-efficacy continues to drop. This then has consequences for their ability to set expectations and they engage in further self-blame for their situation (Herbert et al. 1991).

Self-efficacy and outcome expectations subsequently combine to influence both the identification and pursuit of career orientated personal goals (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 420-421). Often the primary focus of women living with domestic violence is day to day survival, not setting personal or career goals or taking positive action to achieve such goals. Low self-efficacy and expected outcomes can also combine to act as a barrier for positive action toward goal attainment. Domestic violence victims are often robbed of a sense of control, lack career exposure and associated information and may have little resources and goal-setting skills. These factors all combine to present barriers to both the development of goals and achievement of such goals (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 421). For victims of intimate partner violence the setting of goals is particularly difficult as contemporary research would suggest the importance of a potent self-concept is key to fostering progress to career goals and it is these very skills which are undermined by domestic violence (Salomone 1988).

Hence it is argued that a framework targeted to the needs of women who have experienced domestic violence should be developed so that they can join the greater numbers of women seeking advanced training through university education to achieve vocational choices which enable them to become economically independent (Goodman et al. 1993).

Empowerment Model

As a result of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and the associated SCCT framework, Chronister and McWhirter (2003, 422–424) suggest a model to assist battered women utilise resources and opportunities to establish economic independence through long-term career counselling thus leading to sustainable employment. This model focuses on empowerment of domestic violence victims by developing interventions aligned with the constructs of self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goal attainment. The empowerment model focuses on working with victims through collaboration, context, competence, critical consciousness and community. It challenges these women to realistically estimate their capabilities and confront their beliefs (Betz 2004).

Collaboration is characterised by the counsellor and victim working together to define problems and mutually construct goals and strategies for change. Chronister and McWhirter (2000, 422) assert that it is essential that the life situation of the battered woman, including

her education and career concerns, be understood in context of her broader life. Considering the context of the situation enables counsellors to balance short-term needs with longer-term career and educational goals. It is also important to set short-term goals for battered women to enable them to achieve success (Solberg et al. 1995).

Chronister and McWhirter (2003, 422) also stress the importance of the counsellor being able to facilitate the identification of current skills of domestic violence victims as well as those required for the achievement of long-term goals. Given that self-efficacy expectations are influenced by positive performance results, vicarious learning, physiological responses and verbal encouragement, counsellors can assist with identification of prior positive performance, construct activities that provide opportunities to experience success in relevant skill areas, increase exposure to positive feedback and encouragement, increase opportunity for vicarious learning situations and provide strategies to assist with the management of physiological symptoms as a result of violent situations. Research indicates that all of the above strategies can assist in increasing self-efficacy thus competence identification and attainment (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 423).

The concept of Critical Consciousness is also highlighted as a vital component of career planning for domestic violence victims. This aspect can be described as a woman's ability to critically examine herself within her life context thus having the ability to self-reflect on how they can influence and respond to their environment (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 423). This concept is important as it serves to decrease the survivor's dependency upon the counsellor thus facilitating the transformation of the battered women from victim to survivor (Browne 1993).

The last component of the empowerment model is that of 'community'**.** It is important that the woman's connection to the community is regained given the probability of past social/economic abuse and associated isolation. Participation in a support group or an affiliation of some kind can provide emotional and social support and validation through a sense of belonging. Perhaps more importantly, community can be a source of verbal encouragement, vicarious learning and a place to connect with role models for future career and academic goals (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 423). The sense of isolation and shame for victims is hugely decreased by attendance at such support groups (Bryant et al. 1990).

This model serves as a framework for the promotion of long-term career planning, thus sustainable employment by addressing, as put forward by Chronister and McWirter (2003, 424), specific needs of domestic violence victims and looking beyond the short-term crisis model often adopted. Whilst this model focuses on an intensive program of counselling and subscribes to the importance of the development of self-efficacy, it is only one part of the equation when working towards sustainable employment for domestic violence victims. Not only is it imperative that domestic violence victims have access to training and education opportunities in order to complement career counselling, it is also imperative that legislation frameworks provide support mechanisms to increase the ability of domestic violence victims to secure quality and long-term employment.

Conclusion

Historically, Social Services within Australia have focussed on short-term crisis intervention such as provision of accommodation, welfare assistance and other emergency support

services (Costello et al. 2005, 254). As a consequence there has been little funding provided for systemic planning in areas such as job search and career development as a means to independence for domestic violence victims. It is argued that career and education opportunities need to be brought to the forefront in order for domestic violence victims to achieve sustainable employment and thus long-term economic independence (Chronister and McWhirter 2003, 418-419).

SCCT is put forward as one potential model to serve as a framework for the promotion of job training and career planning to enhance employment possibilities of domestic violence victims. This model serves as a framework for the promotion of long-term career planning, thus offering the prospect of sustainable employment for domestic violence victims. Whilst counselling is imperative it needs to be complemented by training and education experiences as well as a legislative framework conducive to the needs of marginalised groups.

International studies have found that successful employment programs and initiatives to address employment issues of those experiencing domestic violence exhibit longer-term time horizons that focus on career planning and development, comprise counselling frameworks that incorporate personal, social and community elements, and offer training and professional advice.

Such programmes require partnerships between the not for profit sector, universities and the government to ensure that victims of domestic violence are not only able to leave their abuser but can do so knowing that they will have the support services of a community organisation while pursuing university studies to enable then to join the workforce in sustainable and highly paid work which will offer themselves and their children a future free of violence, fear, ill health and poverty.

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