



Centre for Research
on Violence Against Women and Children



Working With Communities.

The Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children: A Community Consultation – Phase Two Report: Focus Group Findings

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Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children (CRVAWC): A Community Consultation

PHASE 2 REPORT: Focus Group Findings

Individuals connected to the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children (CRVAWC) through schools and school boards, community agencies, research projects, and the University of Western Ontario, were asked to participate in two CRVAWC focus groups scheduled in June 2004. Ninety-four individuals were invited to attend. These were the same members of the community who previously had been invited to complete the CRVAWC community survey. Nine individuals participated in the focus groups. No demographic information was elicited as anonymity was promised to participants. This report highlights important findings from the CRVAWC community focus groups.

CRVAWC Community Focus Group Questions and Participant Responses

The findings from the CRVAWC community focus groups revealed a number of important considerations and suggestions for the CRVAWC website, newsletters, promotional, and awareness materials.

Focus Group Discussion Questions

What do you see as the strengths of the CRVAWC?

Focus group participants were quick to stress the role of staff as being a strength of the Centre. Participants also identified the large network of community and academic individuals involved in the centre, and the fact that it truly provides research opportunities that may not otherwise be available. Participants felt that the centre fosters a non-threatening, and non-competitive academic environment whereby individuals are able to truly collaborate on projects. The centre provides the community with access to individuals who not only have experience and expertise in their areas of inquiry, but also with access to people with vision in particular areas of study. Focus group participants stressed that the centre fills a unique niche in the community and should be, and has been, recognized for its' excellence.

Do you have any ideas for building on the strengths of the CRVAWC?

Because there are so many people involved in various aspects of the centre, focus group participants suggested that the centre might want to concentrate more on facilitating even more networking within this very large group. One participant suggested posting contact information of people involved with the centre on the website. Finally, focus group participants thought it important to make people more aware of all the great supports offered through the centre and its staff, such as assistance in writing grant applications.

How important do you feel a gender and diversity analysis is to the work of the CRVAWC?

The answer to this questions was a resounding and unanimous “EXTREMELY!”. Most participants said that it was crucial or essential that projects supported by the centre attempt to include a gender and/or diversity analysis as part of their focus.

What do you perceive to be the areas of improvement for the work of the CRVAWC?

Participants identified four improvements which could be made: 1) communication regarding the people involved in each of the various projects happening in collaboration with the centre, perhaps via providing email addresses and other contact information on the centre website, 2) dissemination of completed work, 3) more of a focus on non-academic, or practical/applied areas, 4) supporting non-academic, or community agency members, in their research endeavors even more than the centre already does.

In what directions would you like to see the CRVAWC move towards in future work?

The focus group participants identified a number of directions for future work of the centre.

The directions identified for research are as follows: 1) research on violence and disability made a focus and/or priority, not just an add-on to another project, 2) research on legal systems which perpetuate or successfully prevent violence, to compare international connections, similarities, and differences, 3) research on the role of the media in violence against women and children, 4) research on the pervasiveness of violence and feelings of powerlessness to make change.

The directions identified for other work are as follows: 1) develop more handbooks for teachers, police officers, social workers, so that front line workers have access to the knowledge gained from the kind of research that is happening through the centre, 2) include a ‘duty to report’ in the organizational policy, 3) promoting the centre’s own work as a way of improving public safety and security, 4) run workshops for teachers, police officers, social workers, employees of community agencies and clinics, and other front line workers, so they can learn more about the issues affecting their clients and the people in their community and so they can better help them, 5) disseminate more research, information, and handbooks in smaller, rural areas.

Name an accomplishable goal that you would like to see the CRVAWC achieve in the next year?

Focus group participants though it would be useful to see some research conducted on the ‘life cycle of violence’ and the realities and effects of violence from birth to the elderly.

CRVAWC Community Focus Groups Review of Mission Statement, Research Priorities, and Centre Objectives

In addition to the questions asked of focus group participants, the focus groups provided an excellent venue in which to review the mission statement of the CRVAWC, the research priorities, and the centre objectives.

CRVAWC Mission Statement

The Centre promotes the development of community-centred, action research on violence against women, and children. The Centre's role is to facilitate the cooperation of individuals, groups and institutions representing the diversity of the community to pursue research questions and training opportunities to understand and prevent abuse. It serves local, national and international communities by producing information and tools to assist in the daily work against violence toward women and children.

CRVAWC Mission Statement Suggestions

The mission statement posted on the website should have a statement about feminist research perspectives. Also missing is the aspect of centre work involving education, training, and outreach, as well as advocacy for women and children. Lastly, the mission statement does not mention the dissemination of information, rather just the production of information and tools.

Also, focus group participants thought that the centre does much more than the mission statement indicates, including: advocacy for change in public policy, informing a more general population, providing a link to other research centres, and community partnerships.

CRVAWC Research Priorities

The Centre initiates and seeks funding for projects relating to the following themes:

- **Healthy Relationships**
- **Violence and Its Impact on Health and Well Being**
- **Gender Inequality and its intersections with**
 - **Racism**
 - **Immigration Status**
 - **Ableism**
 - **Homophobia**
 - **Poverty**
 - **Ageism**

The Centre conducts research that is relevant to:

- **Legal Systems**
- **Workplaces**
- **Families and Intimate Relationships**
- **Health and Mental Health Care Systems**
- **Educational Institutions**

- **Communities**
- **Social Service Agencies**
- **Anti-violence Agencies**

CRVAWC Research Priorities Suggestions

The research priorities were identified by focus group participants as missing some key elements. Firstly, the feminist perspective is not mentioned in this summary of research priorities. Classism should be included in the list of 'isms'. And although ableism is listed here, one participant protested that it has never been the focus of the research, but rather an add-on to other projects. One participant suggested that perhaps the term homophobia could be examined and adjusted to reflect current feminist thinking and the idea that the issue of homophobia is not about fear but about prejudice. The term homoprejudice might replace the term homophobia in the above list. Participants agreed that intersectionality is key to the research. If the research reflects all groups then the tools developed out of the research will be applicable to more people within the population, not just to the dominant culture.

With regards to the list of agencies and groups to whom the Centre's research is relevant, there are a few things missing. These include: international communities, and emerging technologies to which children increasingly have access. Participants expressed concern that we tend to discuss and protest war brutalities in Iraq, but we fail to address the violence that children are exposed to right here in our own living rooms and backyards.

CRVAWC Centre Objectives AND Suggestions

- 1. Emphasize interdisciplinary research and training that will foster ongoing collaboration between academic faculty and students, service providers and victims of violence using feminist research perspectives.**

Focus group participants thought that the feminist analysis of research (power and balance) needed to be stressed more here in the objectives, and in general. It affects how data is interpreted and disseminated. Perhaps the centre's website could post an explanation of the feminist perspective (with some examples and/or a continuum).

- 2. Undertake and complete a series of collaborative research projects that will examine the "life-cycle" of violence against women and children, from the early development of childhood attitudes regarding gender-based aggression through to rehabilitative projects, such as counseling for male batterers and legal remedies for abused women and children.**

Participants said that the 'life-cycle' of violence has not been a focus of the research or activities. The centre has not expanded research to reflect all ends of the lifecycle spectrum. The elderly are a particularly salient group to which the study of violence has not been a major focus. Also, this objective does not discuss the institution of gender division or looking at genderedness on an individual or systemic basis.

- 3. Produce action-orientated research that will result in usable products in a variety of forms, including resource material, videos, and other demonstrative products**

which will be accessible to members of local, provincial, national and global communities.

Participants thought that dissemination should include alternate formats because the material must be accessible in diverse communities. Alternate formats include Braille, diskette, large print, plain language, alternative languages

- 4. Test all products against the standards of cultural sensitivity and applicability to the most high risk populations in the community, including people with disabilities, First Nations people, and members of immigrant and refugee communities.**

Participants did not like the wording of this objective. They wanted to know what it meant to 'test all products'. It seemed, to the focus group participants, that this was a case of not using plain language to express objectives and/or priorities of the centre. This kind of language encourages a gap between academia and the community. This objective may need to be better explained. Participants also suggested that disabilities be changed to disAbilities, and that gay/bi-sexual/lesbian/transgendered, and 'deaf culture' be added to the list in this objective.

- 5. Represent a diverse community through a governance structure involving and advisory board composed of academics, service providers, and representatives of different community groups within London and area.**

The focus group participants had some real concerns about this objective. They wanted to know the role and structure of the advisory board. They expressed that it comes across as being a secret society where no one seems to know what is going on within the advisory board and no one knows who is on the board. Focus group participants thought that the board should be more advertised and more open to people who wish to join. If the board is made up of diverse individuals from the community and academia, then the board will be more representative of the population it serves. Focus group participants also suggested the idea that the centre's advisory board be a working board by having influential members who can help the centre to realize its goals.

Final Comments from Focus Group Members

There is a need to actively solicit community information and feedback. If the centre is an action-based research centre, then they should be looking for products other than just research. Furthermore, there is a general misunderstanding or lack of understanding about what constitutes action research. With much of the research occurring through the centre there is a piece missing - what happens after the project is finished? How is the knowledge used? If the centre is producing great research with great recommendations, it does not change the world until it is disseminated.