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Domestic Violence and Human Rights: Local Challenges to a Universal Framework

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Over the past 15-20 years there has been a dramatic increase in transnational social movements including the movement to eradicate violence against women. This paper examines the development of the transnational women's movement and the prioritizing of violence against women (VAW) as a universal women's agenda using the United Nations (U.N.) human rights conferences as a focal point. As one form of VAW, domestic violence (DV) has been placed into the human rights context by many organizations globally. The implications and possible limitations of universalizing a framework for DV are explored using salient examples from various areas of the world. It is suggested that the framing of DV as a human rights violation is relevant to social work in light of social work's role in the critical analysis of framing of social problems and the emergent movement in the United States for social work to become more internationally-focused.

Keywords: Domestic violence, human rights, violence against women, U.N. human rights conferences, international social work

Linking violence against women (VAW) to human rights is rooted in the movement to recognize "women's rights as human rights" (Bunch, 1990) and to recent United Nations (U.N.) conventions and declarations, including the 1993 *Declaration to Eliminate Violence against Women*, the 1992 19th *General Recommendation* made by the Committee to Eliminate

Discrimination against Women and the 1995 *Beijing Declaration* (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). This linking of VAW and human rights has influenced the transnational women's movement and women's movements around the world. Funding entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state governments have all taken up the challenge to work towards the elimination of violence against women (Dauer, 2002; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Merry, 2002).

In recent years domestic violence (DV), as one form of VAW, has been examined using a human rights framework with much of the accompanying dialogue centering on the applicability of international law to DV—primarily focusing on the debate regarding the so-called private nature of DV and how private, individual violence can be addressed through international law (Amnesty International, 2005; Beasley & Thomas, 1994; Coomaraswamy, 2000; Hawkins & Humes, 2002; Levesque, 1999; Moore, 2003; Roth, 1994; Zorn, 1999).

This paper summarizes the rise of the international women's movement in relation to human rights and violence against women and examines a number of examples from the global DV movement to illustrate how the tendency towards using universal frameworks may be problematic. The examples demonstrate how Northern conceptualizations of DV, which some would argue may be driving the human rights movement (Grewal, 1999; Mertus & Goldberg, 1994), have influenced the framing of DV and interventions in various cultural contexts. The North/South distinction used throughout this paper characterizes the North geographically and symbolically as the site of most of the world's privileged and affluent countries versus the South as the site of countries that are economically, socially and politically marginalized. This geographical distinction is based on the Northern/Southern hemispheres yet also is used symbolically to differentiate between the privileged and marginalized peoples, regardless of geographical location (Dirlik, 1997; Mohanty, 2002). This exploration is relevant to social work given of the role of social workers in framing and intervening in social problems as well as the current focus on the globalization of social work practice (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Mohan, 2005).

Violence against Women and Human Rights

The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* defines violence against women as physical, sexual, and/or psychological violence within the family, the community, and/or any violence that is condoned by the state. Some examples included in the definition are marital rape and spousal abuse, sexual harassment, and trafficking (U.N., 1993, Article 2).

Given that there has been a general consensus through international committees and conventions on the Declaration's definition of VAW, this will be the working definition that will be used throughout the paper. A critical area of concern however, is the degree to which various cultural groups define VAW in a different manner and whose voices may have been left out of the international dialogue regarding VAW. Future research to illuminate these issues should examine the impact that universalizing language and conceptualizations of violence in international human rights has had upon various groups—particularly groups that either may be less represented in the international human rights arena or groups that may have a different construction of human rights.

In 1948 the U.N. General Assembly created the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which, while not binding, set in motion the development of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). Taken together, these covenants provide the basis for what is seen as transnational human rights (U.N., 1978). Both the ICCPR and the ICESCR indicate that the rights should be ascribed equally to men and women. *The Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) ultimately holds ratifying states accountable for insuring that women's rights are protected under the ICCPR and the ICESCR. Additionally, this convention provides a framework in which ratifying states are held accountable to change cultural norms that oppress women (Freeman, 1993).

Transnational Social Movements

Transnational social movements (TSM) have dramatically

increased over the last 15-20 years, in part due to the end of the Cold War, increased challenges due to globalization and increased communication technology. As multilateral organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Alliance were established to address transnational development, TSM have continued to grow to address the social, economic and environmental changes that multilateral organizations and corporations have wrought. These movements have also grown in conjunction with the increased role of the United Nations (U.N.) in addressing human rights, peace, and environmental issues (Smith, 2004).

One of the primary avenues for growth and exchange of ideas for TSM organizations has been U.N.-sponsored conferences, particularly the numerous conferences held in the 1990s (Ferreer & Mueller, 2004; Smith, 2004). These conferences have been seen as avenues for training, resource exchange, and networking, and as targeted arenas for the development of international, national and local political campaigns. In addition to the U.N.-sponsored conferences, additional meetings have occurred in conjunction with the conferences with the strategy of "piggy-backing" on international meetings employed by many TSM organizations (Smith, pp. 322-3).

Keck and Sikkink (1998) state that the transnational women's movement or "international women's networks" (p. 168) were almost completely aligned with the U.N. conferences beginning in Mexico City in 1975 and culminating in Beijing in 1995. The high profile nature of these conferences helped to create legitimacy for the claims and issues that were prioritized by global women's movements. Of note is whether this alignment was truly transnational or simply a consensus among the countries and organizations that were represented at the U.N. conferences, which possibly narrowed the scope of whose voices were included.

One critique of the importance that has been given to the U.N. conferences is that not all social movement organizations are able to attend and/or actively participate primarily due to financial constraints as well as restrictions on NGO participation in the conference activities (Mertus & Goldberg, 1994). These formal limitations from the U.N. events result in less representation from organizations based in poorer regions

of the South and in a reframing of issues to more closely resemble issues of importance to the wealthier North (Stienstra, 2000). Tensions among individuals and organizations from the North and the South were apparent despite an increase in Southern representation at select conferences. Participation in the women's caucuses increased from approximately 1,000 individuals at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo to over 1,300 groups involved in the women's caucus at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Although the caucuses provided a venue for greater participation in the conferences, the leadership of the caucuses was maintained by groups from the North. Participation in caucus activity is often driven by location and economics, as the majority work is done by volunteers and is often centered in New York City (Steinstra, 2000). Increased inclusiveness in the global conferences has been supported by funding from the U.N. and other funding organizations (Smith, 2004). Such actions have promoted increased participation from the South, yet disproportionate representation is an issue that needs to be addressed if the activity of the U.N. and the U.N.-sponsored conferences continue to have a significant influence on transnational social movement activity.

Universalizing Violence against Women

Linking Women's Rights with Human Rights

Although viewing women's rights in a human rights context had been identified through CEDAW, which was adopted in 1979 (Charlesworth, 1994), it appears to have been taken up in earnest in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the work of Charlotte Bunch, director of the Center for Global Issues and Women's Leadership. In "Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights," Bunch (1990) states that the Northern concept of human rights limits the rights of women, particularly socioeconomic rights, by placing more importance on rights of free speech and press which are of greater value to men and to individuals in more developed countries. Bunch indicates that issues of socioeconomic rights and violence against women are critical to the well-being of women and that states should be held accountable for the

more "private" abuses directed towards women. Bunch also describes the way in which CEDAW fails to address violence against women in a significant manner.

In 1992, *General Recommendation No. 19* was added to CEDAW, which more explicitly addresses the issue of violence against women by stating that gender-based violence is discriminatory (CEDAW, 1992). The recommendation also notes that previous state reports to the committee did not "adequately reflect[ed] the close connection between discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (CEDAW, 1992). As a result of this deficit, the committee proposed *General Recommendation No. 19* to provide a more specific linking of violence against women and discrimination so that state parties would address the issue of VAW in their reviews and reports to the committee.

Subsequent to this addition was the development of the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The declaration was developed through input from three regional non-governmental caucuses and preparatory conferences held in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia. The resolution platform identified by the African regional meeting was precedent-setting with regards to the issue of cultural norms and traditions, as the declaration charges governments with the responsibility to universally protect women from violence that is perpetuated by traditional practices and religious extremism (Sullivan, 1994). Although non-binding, the declaration has been viewed as a significant step in the attempt to universalize concern about violence against women.

Transnational Networks: Why Violence against Women?

Why is it that violence against women became the hallmark of the Vienna convention given that there is a multiplicity of structural problems that perpetuate women's oppression, especially in developing countries? Mertus and Goldberg (1994) describe a growing emphasis from all regions of the world to focus efforts on violence against women, stating:

As this awareness [of the pervasive nature of violence against women] crystallized in the minds of women

throughout the world, a common understanding emerged in the work of women advocating for women's rights protection. Violence against women has been segmented and sequestered out of the public discourse on human rights, just as its occurrence has been kept hidden from public scrutiny (p. 209).

It may have been inevitable that women would unify around the issue of violence against women because all women could agree on and support the issue as a human rights violation. The issue was particularly salient due to the extensive media coverage and public outrage about the rapes of women in the former Yugoslavia at the time of the Vienna convention. Although there was virtually unanimous support for the platform, a group of Arab women lobbied at the convention for literacy to be included, yet this request was ultimately denied for strategic reasons. In the hope of gaining acceptance for the violence against women platform, the Women's Caucus did not want to include additional concerns, fearing that shifting from the agenda of violence against women would compromise their position (Mertus & Goldberg, 1994).

What was left out or silenced, given the singular focus on violence against women, were issues such as literacy, gender segregation, divorce, and citizenship—issues that may have been of more salience to women from developing nations than industrialized ones. For some women who were working on women's and/or human rights in their countries, but could not attend the conferences, these exclusions essentially shut out their voices and concerns from the dialogue and proceedings process (Mertus & Goldberg, 1994). The pressure to maintain a singular focus on violence against women and the exclusion of more structural issues such as poverty and citizenship appeared to be strategic in terms of using violence as a stepping-stone to open up dialogue. This was also an agenda that Northern feminists and Southern activists could agree upon. Given their privileged status and lack of personal experiences with issues such as dire poverty and literacy, Northern feminists may have seen violence as the over-riding issue.

Yumi Lee (1997) provides an insightful critique of the singular focus on violence against women and on Northern representations of violence. She points out that while Section D of the *Beijing Document* from the Fourth World Conference on

Women states that low socioeconomic status of women can be seen both as a cause and an effect of VAW, the document does not elaborate on issues of economic oppression and state policies that perpetuate women's oppression through economic, structural, and political means. She indicates that there are four categories of violence—direct, indirect, regressive, and alienating—and yet the *Beijing Document* fails to address any violence other than sexual and domestic violence. Pointing out that up to 70% of the world's most extremely poor are women, Lee writes that "while it is simple to frame laws to charge husbands who abuse their wives, it is not as simple to deal with the economic violence of capitalism" (p. 50).

It is important to consider how of the focus on direct violence against women serves to obfuscate issues such as economic oppression which allow and perpetuate violence against women. Keck and Sikkink (1998) indicate that certain patterns are clear in the development of a transnational movement which include increased global awareness, a coalescing of this awareness when a "target" emerges—such as the 1993 World Conference and the Beijing Conference, and a "condensation symbol"—such as the rapes in former Yugoslavia (p. 181). In addition, during this emerging movement substantial funding from the Ford Foundation supported NGO formation and growth while creating an asymmetric funding system that favored the United States and Europe. The Center for Women's Global Leadership, located at Rutgers University, NJ was also a catalyst to the women's human rights campaign. Explaining the choice of violence against women as a platform, center materials indicated that violence crosses national, class, racial, age, and ethnic lines and this content alliance provided a strategic and cross-cultural platform (Keck & Sikkink).

In their examination of the linkage between human rights and domestic violence in the international arena, Hawkins and Humes (2002) provide a theoretical model that suggests possible reasons for growth during the 1990s. The model examines leaders, followers and nonconformists in the international human rights/domestic violence movement using North and South America as an example of how the interaction of "policy windows" and international socialization of normative behaviors provides the opportunity for social movements to take

hold (p. 241). The grassroots battered women's movement that had managed to stay afloat in unfavorable political climates and the shift in the administration in the early 1990s provided these policy windows and helped the U.S. become a clear leader in the DV movement. With the signing of the Violence against Women Act in 1994, the U.S. set an agenda in terms of responding to domestic violence while, at the same time, international norms regarding violence against women were being developed through the 1993 Vienna Convention.

Starting with the Decade of the Woman through the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, VAW has become a hallmark of international efforts and a significant transnational movement to gain international acceptance of women's rights as human rights has taken place. The large-scale and visible conventions and the declarations that were developed helped to legitimize the human rights agenda although the local and global impact of the development of this universalizing framework has yet to be fully explored.

Challenges in Implementing a Universal Framework

The idea that violence against women and domestic violence are violations of women's human rights seems, at face value, to be an accurate and viable framework for international intervention. Yet, it remains unknown if such constructs are being applied to individual communities in ways that are empowering and take into account local and regional history, political structure, and culture. How various cultures construct their ideas about family, marriage, rights, law and violence are some of the factors that must be examined in order to understand the practicality of applying a universal framework to local contexts. Complex issues such as Muslim religious law, Hawaiian constructions of the etiology of domestic violence, the changing political landscape in Russia, and power differentials between the North and South, are examples that illuminate the need to critically analyze the universal application of the human rights framework.

Human Rights Law and Muslim Law—Two Systems in Opposition?

Lisa Hajjar (2004) explores three political frameworks in the Muslim societies—communalization, nationalization and theocratization—through which the interaction of state power, *shari'a* (Islamic law), intrafamily violence, and women's rights struggles can be analyzed. Hajjar successfully analyzes the problematic nature of the universal human rights discourse by revealing the complex and diverse nature of Muslim societies. Over the past 25 years there have been two important historical factors operating, possibly with counter purposes: the Islamic movement, often tied to nationalism with the goal of social order and preservation of religion, culture and a patriarchal familial system, and the international women's rights and human rights movements which is becoming more widespread throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In terms of the domestic violence movement, the issue of gender equality versus social stability is often a contested issue in many Muslim communities. An impasse emerges as women's rights advocates position gender equality as paramount to the elimination of domestic violence and Islamists position hierarchical gender relations as legitimate under *shari'a*, and necessary for social order.

Hajjar (2004), temporarily "bracketing" the issue of the accuracy of the interpretation of *shari'a*, examines the issue of harm versus right in the context of *shari'a* and raises the question of the historical and social contexts in which Islamic law has been interpreted (p. 7). Religious law is communalized in some states in which personal status laws that regulate family relationships are governed by diverse religious groups. In these states religious law is invoked in each individual case concerning family relationships with power vested in the religious leader or institution as opposed to the state. The purpose of providing autonomy to each religious community is to promote stability in a country that is largely religiously pluralistic. In countries where the official religion is Islam and the state uses religious law to inform and guide policies, the dominant interpretation of *shari'a* is often used to challenge state authority. In theocratic countries, *shari'a* is state law. Hajjar sees all three legal systems as oppressive to women and, in some

instances, to men, when citizens' rights are defined by dominant interpretations of religious texts. Although Hajjar does not necessarily support cultural relativism, especially regarding issues of domestic violence and the safety of women, she does present an important analysis by revealing the complexity of religious law in Muslim countries. In doing so, she suggests the importance of understanding how universal international law sanctioning violence against women has different meanings in different contexts.

Intervention within a Local Context

If the goal of the international women's movement is to avoid the tendency to be culturally imperialistic, intervening in DV needs to be appropriately understood and contextualized. Merry (2001), in her study of three varied approaches to domestic violence in Hilo, Hawaii, explores the import and export of Northern ideologies and the counter-approach of applying indigenous knowledge. The Alternatives to Violence Program is a feminist-based batterer intervention program that was developed using the Duluth Model, a model of domestic violence intervention developed in Duluth, Minnesota in the late 1970s. The second program grew out of the Pentecostal Christian church movement and the third, *ho'oponopono*, is an indigenous problem-solving and healing model.

Merry (2001) traces the historical developments of the three intervention models in Hilo, identifying different conceptualizations of the etiology of violence and the intervention into violence which are apparent in all three models. The Christian intervention and the *ho'oponopono* intervention share some similar foundations in terms of the identification of supernatural powers being solely or partially responsible for violent behaviors. The Duluth Model strongly supports men to be accountable for their use of violence and places violent acts into the context of "power and control," maintaining that men use violence to maintain dominance over their partners (p. 49). Interestingly, the juxtaposition of these three interventions reveals a local response to domestic violence that places the issue of secular versus religious intervention and beliefs at the forefront of the debate, similar to the secular versus

religious debate which Hajjar examines.

The *ho'oponopono* intervention also incorporates restorative justice as a response to domestic violence. Restorative justice programs, which often depend on community involvement and hold the perpetrator accountable on a community level, have been developed in both indigenous communities and in the North and have been based on indigenous practices. The more localized approach of restorative justice is not without its own challenges and criticisms. Restorative justice has been viewed by some as a counterpoint to retributive justice, which is based on punishment and as a feminist criminal justice response as opposed to an authoritarian response (Daly, 2002). Given the on-going debate about the effectiveness of traditional criminal justice approaches in alleviating DV, restorative justice might seem to be an ideal response to the problem, yet strong opponents and proponents exist. Proponents of restorative justice suggest that the inclusion of the larger community is a way to continue to break the silence that surrounds DV and to create greater community awareness and involvement in standing up against violence against women (Braithwaite & Daly, 1998; Pranis, 2002). Additionally, restorative justice has often been based on indigenous communitarian approaches such as Maori and Navajo circles (Braithwaite & Daly; Coker, 2002) and has been seen as having potential to adapt more readily to diverse cultures and communities as opposed to retributive justice that has often disproportionately targeted communities of color (Coker, 2002). These communitarian approaches have some common elements in that they provide a community structure for dispute resolution in which members of both the victim's and the perpetrator's communities come together to provide support. These circles or conferences work to involve the larger community and to address emotional and symbolic reparation in addition to economic reparation (Braithwaite, 1999). Restorative justice interventions are seen as differing from a strictly retributive justice response to domestic violence, which serves only to punish the offender (Braithwaite & Strang, 2002).

Opponents suggest that some of the primary problems with restorative justice are the potential for reprivatizing DV; the potential lack of victim safety; the on-going nature of DV

rather than an isolated one-time act; and the possibility that men who batter their partners may be held less accountable in restorative justice and/or may see restorative justice as a less serious response and therefore may not take their violent actions seriously. Additional critiques indicate that involving the community in sentencing could include members of either the offender's or victim's support system who will support the offender's violence and blame the victim, as opposed to holding the offender accountable. There is also the potential to homogenize and romanticize indigenous cultural practices (Busch, 2002; Coker, 2002; Hudson, 2002; Smith, 2005).

Merry's (2001) research and the ongoing debate about the applicability of restorative justice to DV point out the need to critically engage in continued assessment of the effectiveness of interventions and to avoid the assumption that a program that is effective in one location should be exported to another location. Although adopting a universal framework with which to understand DV does not automatically suggest the adoption of a universal intervention for DV, it is important to remain cautious of this probability as demonstrated by Hemment's (2004) research in Russia.

Exporting 'Best Practices'

Hement (2004) examines the influence of the transnational women's movement on the development of women's crisis centers during 19 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Moscow, Tver' and Pskov. Hemment critiques what she sees as Northern attempts to universalize women's experiences with domestic violence. Because post-communist Russia, like all nations, has a unique history, it follows that the women in Russia would prioritize needs in a specific manner relevant to their own history and therefore, may approach domestic violence in a manner in line with their own experiences.

Hement (2004) states that two contributing factors to the development of women's crisis centers in Russia were the increase of U.S. and European funding to Russia during the early transitional years and the ease with which violence against women provoked outrage and mobilized women on an international front. By the mid 1990s, crisis centers began to follow the established Northern response to domestic and

sexual violence against women, using a "blueprint" supplied by the transnational women's networks (p. 824).

One women's advocate in Tver' envisioned a crisis center as an "anti-crisis center" (p. 826), a place where women could come for support regarding economic or workplace discrimination. Other centers adopted a Northern or "international standard" (p. 828) for their framework yet responded to local needs with broader programs, focusing little on domestic/sexual violence. Over time, Hemment witnessed that pressure to conform more closely to a Northern model came from funding sources and NGO staff and donors. In Tver' the Northern model "won out" over the "anti-crisis center" (p. 830) and Zhenskii Svet was created as a domestic violence and sexual assault crisis center, backed by transnational women's movements and funding sources.

Hement reported that by 2001 uncertainty and lack of conviction were present in conversations with the directors of the crisis centers. Ambivalence regarding services seemed to center around expectations from outside funding sources who appeared to be losing interest in domestic and sexual abuse programs while gaining interest in addressing issues of sex trafficking. Summarizing the influence international funding sources had on the development of social services for women, Oktiabrina, a crisis center founder, said, "We have to be like chameleons to please the foundations. Even if you don't want to take it [trafficking] on, you have to!" (2004, p. 834).

Can a Human Rights Framework be Colonizing?

Does bringing the issue of domestic violence into a global context vis-à-vis a human rights framework reinscribe Northern hegemonic feminism in ways that are either ineffectual or oppressive and colonizing to women in developing countries? The human rights framework privileges individual rights above collective rights and assumes that there is a universal acceptance of the concept of autonomous rights; yet this is a Northern, not universal construct. Group rights or the rights of a collective body are often marginalized by Northern discourse, which places claims for collective rights into the category of tradition while privileging the autonomous

individual above the collective (Grewal, 1999, p. 341).

Another way in which the human rights discourse and the inherent privileging of the U.N. conventions and treaties could be problematic is the tendency of advocates in the North to place themselves in a role of rescuer for those in the South who are victims of human rights violations. From this position the U.S. and other Northern countries marginalize the practices and people of developing countries as 'backwards' and in need of guidance. For example, in the United States VAW has often been framed as a public health issue rather than a human rights issue while VAW in developing countries has been framed as a human rights abuse (Grewal, 1999).

Even if framed as a human rights abuse, universalizing domestic violence as a global agenda for all women is not without problems. Grewal (1999) astutely points out the danger of decontextualizing domestic violence, both in how 'domestic' and 'violence' are defined and understood as well as how the issue is best approached. She also identifies the importance of the critique of the US domestic violence movement by women of color who have challenged the movement for its lack of a comprehensive and culturally-sensitive approach to domestic violence (see Crenshaw, 1994; Incite, 2005). The almost exclusive focus on a "crime control discourse" (Ferraro, 1996) also needs to be taken into account when examining the framing of and subsequent intervention into DV. If the United States domestic violence agencies and organizations are engaged in a struggle to equally support white women, women of color, immigrant, and refugee women, they should be willing to examine how they position themselves with regards to how other countries address domestic violence, allowing a two-way dialogue to emerge rather than a one-way delivery of ideas and intervention strategies.

Social Work Implications

Elisabeth Reichert (2003) believes that within the U.S., social workers have not embraced the human rights framework in the same manner as social workers in other countries. Basing her analysis on the U.S. based National Association of Social Workers (NASW) 1996 *Code of Ethics*; Reichert indicates that

although the code echoes many of the same ideals as human rights documents, it does not specifically mention human rights. She posits three factors at play in the reluctance of U.S. social workers to engage more actively in the human rights dialogue: a social justice rather than human rights perspective, a tendency to equate human rights solely with political rights, and a local worldview rather than a more international perspective in policy and practice (pp. 7-8).

If social workers in the US are already supporting human rights in their work—whether explicitly or implicitly—what role do they have in the critical examination of DV as a human rights violation? Social workers play a significant role in the framing of social problems and in developing interventions to address the social problems they help to define. If placing DV into a human rights context has indeed become part of the dominant discourse about DV, it is important that social workers engage in critical thinking about the implications of this framing to help illuminate the benefits and challenges of this framework. For example, in the US, framing DV as primarily a criminal justice issue has had a damaging impact on some DV survivors—particularly marginalized groups such as women of color, immigrant women, and their children (Ferraro, 1996; Incite, 2005). Identifying the limitations of certain frameworks has implications for defining social problems and their interventions. While placing DV in a human rights context may appear on the surface to be beneficial, recognizing that some cultural groups may be disproportionately targeted by the use of the human rights framework and that the framing may create an over-reliance on legal interventions is an important element in critically examining the discourse.

As U.S. social workers are being encouraged to increase their engagement on a global level, it becomes even more critical that the profession gain a greater understanding of international issues. Caragata and Sanchez (2002) point out the importance of internationalizing social work curricula and support an expanded focus on global issues in North American schools of social work. Social problems such as world hunger, environmental changes, and development must be understood by social workers so that they can move beyond a local vision of social problems and develop a more global context for issues

that transcend borders. Avoiding the uncritical practice of exporting Northern knowledge into developing countries and promoting increased understanding of global social problems can support social workers to engage in reciprocal learning with persons from other countries— this approach allows for collaboration and an increased understanding of local and universal issues.

Further Questions

A human rights approach to DV appears to have gained legitimacy and salience over the past 15 years, yet the question remains, how has this reframing influenced the field of domestic violence prevention, intervention, and advocacy, and what has been gained and lost by using this new framework? Has the North driven this linkage of DV with human rights and, if so, how can the non-included voices be heard? Has the dramatic rise in transnational organizations related to VAW and DV been helpful for developing nations to create their own social change agendas or has the North unduly influenced the course of these agendas? How have developing nations resisted or accepted the influence of the North with respect to the framing of the problem of domestic violence and the development of policies and programs aimed to reduce and eventually eliminate DV?

Currently, I am examining whether the national DV movement in the United States has adopted the human rights framework. I believe that gaining an understanding of the position of the US will help to identify whether this movement is inclusive or whether it is being utilized by the North to redefine DV in the South yet is not being used within our own borders. I will pay specific attention to the use of this discourse within marginalized communities and thus, will employ the symbolic differentiation of North and South as opposed to the geographical differentiation (Dirlik, 1997). This study may provide a context from which the broader international questions could be examined in the future.

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