The Routledge International Handbook of Domestic Violence and Abuse

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Introduction

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Domestic violence and abuse is a significant global concern, with almost one-third of women worldwide reporting that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their current or former intimate partner in their lifetime (World Health Organization (WHO), 2013a). Globally, research show that 40–70% of female murder victims were killed by their partners (WHO, 2013a). Moreover, mounting evidence shows that domestic violence and abuse has serious consequences for victims’ and victims’ children’s health and social well-being (e.g., Ansara & Hindin, 2011; Black et al., 2011; Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, & Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Sharps, Laughon, & Giangrande, 2007; Vives-Cases, Ruiz-Cantero, Escribà-Agüir, & Miralles, 2011), as well as tremendous economic costs for individuals, families, communities, and countries (Coker, Williams, Follingstad, & Jordan, 2011; Holmes, Richter, Votruba, Berg, & Bender, 2018; Peterson et al., 2018).

Given the pervasiveness and seriousness of domestic violence and abuse, national and international bodies, such as the Council of Europe, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the WHO, have sought to address both the causes and consequences of domestic violence and abuse through the development and implementation of a range of strategies to support victims and to hold to account those who behave abusively towards their current or former partners and their children (e.g., Niolon et al., 2017; WHO, 2013b).

Because domestic violence and abuse continues to be a pressing and important challenge to all our global nations, this Handbook aims to foster an exchange of the latest knowledge concerning what causes and sustains violence between intimate partners, the effectiveness of responses in working with adult and child victims, as well as the effectiveness of responses in working with those who act abusively towards their partners or close family members. By ensuring that each section and chapter provides an authoritative reference, this Handbook seeks to provide a comprehensive compendium and resource concerning domestic violence evidence that can be used valuably by practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and students worldwide. To meet these aims, while also recognising that domestic violence is both universal and shaped by local cultures and contexts, this book includes a diverse group of global experts and draws upon a wide range of contemporary research.

With a total of 50 chapters and 101 authors involved in contributing, we realise that the Handbook might initially appear overwhelming or unwieldy. Here, in this introduction, we
offer a guide to help readers understand the overall goals, frameworks, organisation, and structure of the Handbook. With this guiding introduction, we aim to offer readers ways forward through the Handbook, whether they read every chapter in the Handbook cover to cover in a short time frame or whether they read selected chapters over time.

The Handbook’s guiding frameworks

Given the complex, dynamic, and widespread nature of domestic violence and abuse, the editors chose four key guiding perspectives for this Handbook, including (1) the social ecological framework, (2) intersectionality, (3) interdisciplinarity, and (4) a global point of view.

Ecological

Overall, the handbook frames domestic violence and abuse as an ecological issue while also recognising that gender is a significant factor in victimisation. Specifically, a social ecological framework represents the phenomenon of domestic violence as developing and dynamically existing within the context of four nested environments representing the individual’s context, the interpersonal and relational context, the community context, as well as the larger social environment (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Krug et al., 2002). According to a social ecological framework, violence dynamically and reciprocally manifests through factors across all four levels. In turn, such an understanding of violence requires that we acknowledge and address the social, community, and relationship levels — as well as the individual level — when we aim to address, prevent, and understand violence.

Intersectionality

As noted, while recognising that domestic violence and abuse is a universal problem, the handbook also aims to highlight and underscore how domestic violence and abuse is also shaped by local cultures and contexts as well as by the overlapping and interconnecting identities of the people who experience abuse and victimisation, as well as those who use domestic violence and abuse (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1990). Increasingly, those concerned with domestic violence and abuse emphasise how such abuse is experienced by and impacts diverse people in diverse ways, in particular, how a person’s positions of disadvantage and/or privilege might intersect with experiences of victimisation, as well as domestic violence and abuse perpetration (e.g., Chiu, 2017; Etherington & Baker, 2018; Lippy, Jumarali, Nnawulezi, Williams, & Burk, 2020). Accordingly, all authors were invited to consider the topics within their respective chapters using an intersectionality perspective.

Interdisciplinarity

Domestic violence and abuse is known to affect individuals and families at multiple levels and the health and social impacts are well-recognised. No single discipline can understand or tackle the problem alone and it takes multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approaches to enact primary, secondary, and tertiary responses. The need for such interdisciplinarity is a fundamental framework for the book. Not only are the editors drawn from different disciplinary backgrounds, the author contributors have been purposely selected for their contrasting but complementary expertise within diverse settings. They offer insights on how domestic violence and abuse is addressed within a multitude of disciplines, highlighting in particular the specifics within
disciplines, but crucially, the commonalities that underpin meaningful efforts in relation to interdisciplinary approaches to tackling domestic violence and abuse.

A global point of view

In the same way that domestic violence and abuse cannot be addressed from within one discipline, it cannot be tackled within one country or region. We have already highlighted the global significance of the problem and although the specific nature and manifestation of violence and abuse may vary across settings, it is important to recognise that domestic violence and abuse knows no boundaries. It is a pervasive, pernicious problem that happens across the globe. We have been keen to include contributions from authors from a range of countries in order to capture some of the geographical diversity relating to domestic violence and abuse. We are aware that despite our best efforts, there is under-representation from some regions and this needs to be borne in mind when reading the Handbook. That said, the volume of contributors has resulted in a comprehensive text that captures the global nature of the problem. Moreover, just as the interdisciplinary element captures both difference and commonality, so too does the global viewpoint. Each chapter provides a contextually rich account of domestic violence and abuse in terms of geography and context that may capture the specifics of a particular country, but the roots of the abuse, its consequences, and the mechanisms through which it may be tackled are likely to transcend geographical demarcations.

Why the phrase domestic violence and abuse?

In the early stages of planning the book, we deliberated over the title. There is a plethora of terms that are often used synonymously and this can be incredibly confusing for those who are new to the field. We regard Gender-Based Violence as being an overarching umbrella term that encompasses a range of abuses perpetrated against someone based on their gender. The term tends to be understood as Violence against Women, although it is important to recognise that abuse happens to boys, men, as well as to non-binary and transgender people. Then there are the terms domestic violence and domestic abuse. People use them variously, but these are understood to be all abuse that takes place within a domestic setting. Many people prefer the term ‘abuse’ rather than ‘violence’ because it encourages a wider view and avoids focusing overly on the physical connotations of violence. After all, we know that abuse takes many forms including coercion, control, and emotional abuse – physical violence is not the most prevalent form. Readers from Australia and New Zealand may be more familiar with ‘family violence’ which is used as the preferred term in recognition of the interpretations of the meaning of family in those countries, and the intersection between abuse of intimate partners and children within the same family group. Then there are intimate partner violence and interpersonal violence that again are used synonymously, particularly in North America. These refer to abuse that takes place between current or recent intimate partners and is the most widespread form of domestic violence and abuse. So why our term ‘domestic violence and abuse’? We have selected this term as it is the one that has currency from a political perspective, particularly in the United Kingdom, where this Handbook is published. We see value in using the terms violence and abuse side by side, as a reminder that they are not necessarily the same.

The Handbook’s structure

This Handbook is organised into five major sections, including: (1) theoretical perspectives on domestic violence and abuse, (2) domestic violence and abuse across the life-course,
3) manifestation of domestic violence and abuse, (4) responding to domestic violence and abuse, and (5) researching domestic violence and abuse. These topics and sections were selected to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic of domestic violence as a whole and to convey helpful information and evidence to readers concerning how domestic violence may be theoretically conceived, how domestic violence differs across the life-course and how domestic violence expresses itself in different ways, as well as how we can best address and conduct studies on domestic violence.

Within each section, key topics related to each of the sections’ themes are divided into chapters. In turn, each chapter delves into a key aspect of a facet of domestic violence. For each chapter, our editorial team invited global experts to develop a robust and meaningful summary of the latest thinking and research on the various topics. Each chapter also includes attention — as relevant — to issues of intersectionality, differences in domestic violence which may present due to context and/or culture, and key debates concerning the chapter topic. In addition, each chapter includes a description of the evidence and/or research on which the chapter is based, including the limits of such knowledge.

**Theoretical perspectives**

There are different and sometimes competing ways of understanding what causes and sustains violence and abuse within the context of current or former intimate relationships. How we understand an issue can influence how we respond, and to what degree we see the response as needing to be directed primarily at the level of the individual or society. This section provides an introduction to a number of theoretical perspectives, all of which are helpful, but also have been critiqued for providing an incomplete way of accounting for the varied presentations and motivations underpinning domestic violence and abuse. Throughout the remainder of the Handbook these core theoretical perspectives can be seen in the way different contributors present and discuss various issues.

**Life-course**

Over recent decades there has been mounting evidence for the intergenerational impacts of domestic violence and abuse, with understandings about how its harmful impacts have potential to be carried from one generation to the next. The evidence around this points to the need for understanding domestic violence and abuse from a life-course perspective. This means that it is necessarily viewed as a problem that spans all ages. Although there are sections of the population who may be more at risk (adolescents for example), there needs to be mindfulness that domestic violence and abuse occurs across the lifespan, from cradle to grave. This section of the book then includes rich insights into the problem of domestic violence and abuse from infancy, childhood, mid-life, and into later life.

**Manifestation**

We are now more aware of the many different presentations of domestic violence, and how abuse may present in different forms, and vary depending on a range of issues. In this section each contribution explores a particular form of violence or abuse, such as coercive control, economic abuse, wife abandonment, or sexual violence within intimate relationships, focusing on the particular presentation and the underlying dynamics. In doing so the contributors discuss the intersection of domestic violence with a range of other important issues, exploring
how abuse may present in same-sex relationships or when one or both partners are transgender or non-binary, the added complexities of experiencing domestic violence when disabled, the particularities of intimate partner homicide and honour killings, the relationship between domestic violence and animal abuse, and the use of technology to facilitate harassment, abuse, and violence.

**Responding to domestic violence and abuse**

This section of the Handbook presents the best available evidence, as well as practice and policy innovations, concerning responses to domestic violence and abuse. Responses to domestic violence can include interventions, policies, programmes, services, and strategies. Accordingly, all such responses are described throughout this section and in the chapters. Guided by the social ecological model, this section’s chapters underscore how responses may be directed at individuals, relationships, families, communities, and the greater social context. Likewise, responses include helping address the needs of domestic violence victims and survivors, as well as the needs of those who are actively abusive toward their partners. Accordingly, this section overviews approaches to helping all of those who may be involved with and impacted by domestic violence and abuse.

**Research**

Representing the broad methodologies of qualitative and quantitative research, this final section presents on select aspects of both the principles and practices underpinning research on domestic violence and abuse. In doing so, the ten chapters in this section offer a methodological road map of the myriad of approaches that have been utilised to engage with the experiences of increasingly diverse populations who live with domestic violence and abuse. Grounded in a commitment to hearing the voices of those less heard, this section also focuses on research with those considered marginalised or vulnerable populations while simultaneously arguing for the critical importance of inclusive yet ethically sound research practices to underscore evidence-informed policy and practice. Both the challenges to conducting such research and the innovative methods that have developed in response to these challenges, are outlined.

**Conclusion**

In concluding this chapter, we – the editorial team – send you – the reader – off with our sincere and strong belief that domestic violence and abuse is not intractable, nor is it inevitable. Although domestic violence and abuse has proven to be pervasive, pernicious, and universal, the writings in this Handbook also show that domestic violence and abuse can be prevented, ended, and ameliorated. We hope that the contributions which follow will advance, develop, further, and inspire global efforts to end domestic violence and abuse once and for all.

**References**


