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Introduction

This book is about the role of family members, friends, and co-workers in sexual and domestic violence against women. Informal third parties often are aware of abuse because they have witnessed an abusive episode, heard about it from the victim, or know what the perpetrator did. They may not know the full extent of what is going on, but they often know something. In a surprising number of cases, there are witnesses. Every time a victim tells somebody about abuse, another person beyond victim and perpetrator knows. What do we do with this knowledge?

Sometimes we do nothing, thinking we can remain neutral: "One white woman said, 'Friends came around and saw from the beginning. He smacked me in front of them, saying 'Oh shut up, you're getting on my nerves.' They got up and walked out saying they can't get involved'" (Hanmer, 2000, p. 15). Sometimes we are silent, although we know what is going on: "His uncle abuses his aunt and everybody in his family can tell, but they never say a word about it" (Bancroft, 2002, p. 276). Sometimes we intervene: "Wolk, 46, was arrested after five female Husson students subdued him following the knife attack on his then-wife of seven years" (*Bangor Daily News*, October 5, 2011). "'There was already another girl there, and she was kind of behind him trying to do something . . . as

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I went to grab the guy's hand, I saw he had a nice little knife in his hand . . . A couple of other girls joined us and we just got him down on the ground until security came" (*Bangor Daily News*, May 5, 2010). Often we doubt her story: "I live with my husband's parents and brother. Whatever my husband tells my mother-in-law, all the blame falls on me" (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002, p. 904).

Knowledge of abuse among family, friends, or co-workers is awareness of the problem close to home, not merely as a distant social issue. This makes it particularly challenging, but it also opens windows of opportunity because informal third parties are a potential, and largely untapped, resource for intervention, prevention, and social change. The purpose of this book is to review research on informal responses and explore the interpersonal dynamics surrounding sexual and domestic violence against women who are close to us as sisters, daughters, mothers, friends, co-workers, or neighbors. The goal is to offer a third-party perspective on the social dynamics in which such abuse unfolds and in which it may be prevented.

In this introductory chapter, several issues are addressed to set the stage for the exploration of informal responses. This includes clarifying the context and purpose of the book and delineating its thematic scope. After that, the significance of informal third parties as a first port of call will be highlighted. This chapter concludes with comments on terminology used in the book and previews of the following chapters.

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Informal third parties are often the first to know if somebody close to them is abused. In many cases, police or victim-support services never become involved; informal third parties then are the only ones who know and the only potential source of support (Hanmer, 2000; Hoff, 1990; Kelly, 1996). Informal third parties

respond in different ways: by offering and refusing help, blaming victims, excusing perpetrators, disrupting assaults, dismissing the seriousness of abuse, consoling victims, or taking revenge on perpetrators. Network members may provide emotional and material support, shelter, transportation, money, or childcare; a Canadian survey found that three-fourths of women who left an abusive partner stayed with friends or family during the process of leaving (Rodgers, 1994). Of 158 U.S. women who were survivors of intimate partner abuse and whose cases had reached the courts, all said that a third party knew of the abuse (Belknap et al., 2009). Most common among the third parties were relatives and friends, including the women's children and members of the perpetrator's family, followed by neighbors, co-workers, or classmates. Additional third parties included landlords, teachers, and the children's day care staff.

Some informal responses are helpful and some are not; many victims experience a mix of both. Hanmer (2000) found that friends and family responded to abuse in

> contradictory ways. The responses of others are frequently characterized by alternating behaviours as support moves between the woman and the man. Thus a son may be told to stop hitting his wife when directly observed, to which he may or may not respond, while his parents may demand that [the victim] apologize for upsetting [the perpetrator] when she has been badly beaten on another occasion, but it has not been seen by them. Interventions may be ambiguous and erratic, as family members are pulled this way and that by competing and contradictory values, views and feelings. (p. 14)

> When confronted with repeated violence, women describe how family members and others intervene in women's lives and how women attempt to use networks of family and friends to mitigate, if not resolve, problems with their men. (p. 10)

Research attention paid to informal third parties has ebbed and flowed since the early days of the field. After a trickle of studies in the 1970s and 1980s in the United Kingdom and North America, research activity increased in the 1990s and the 2000s (Binney, Harkell, & Nixon, 1981; Prescott & Letko, 1977; Tan et al., 1995; Ullman, 2010). Interest in informal responses has grown, perhaps in part because of the hope that they will aid early intervention and prevention of abuse (see Budde & Scheune, 2004, with regard to informal interventions in child abuse). However, research on informal responses remains fragmented in several ways.

Informal responses are an important social phenomenon but not an integrated field of research. Lines of inquiry are scattered across separate bodies of literature; there is no single theory or conceptual framework. Data are collected with different methods to answer specific research questions without necessarily integrating findings theoretically; studies that could complement each other are often not considered in conjunction. Most studies have focused on informal responses to victims, whereas comparatively few have considered responses to perpetrators. As a result, the interpersonal dynamics in the social networks of perpetrators are not systematically integrated into understandings of the social context at large, although social ties often connect victims and perpetrators within the same familial, social, or work-related networks (DeKeseredy, 1990; Raghavan et al., 2009). Furthermore, relatively little attention has been paid to the body of anthropological work about gender dynamics in societies in which rape and domestic violence are rare, although this research illustrates not only the existence of shared worldviews incompatible with abuse but also the third-party actions that put these worldviews into practice in everyday life (Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1999; Lepowsky, 1993; McGillivray & Comaskey, 1999; Watson-Franke, 2002).

At present, there is an intriguing, yet fragmented, body of evidence on informal third parties that deserves a closer, more integrated analysis. To overcome this fragmentation, evidence of informal responses from different lines of research is gathered here in one place in order to present an overview of current knowledge and explore implications for research and practice. One goal in this book is to highlight links among lines of inquiries, in particular between responses to victims and responses to perpetrators. For instance, blaming the victim implies shifting blame away from the perpetrator; doing nothing often means giving the perpetrator free reign. Informal responses vary and are often contradictory, and, for the most part, the uptake of such findings in wider intervention debates is still in its early stages. This has hampered an examination of the concurrent impact of informal responses on victims and perpetrators, the interplay of informal responses and formal interventions, and their net effects on victim well-being.

Another goal is to examine the potential of informal responses for intervention and long-term prevention of abuse. As a whole, relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors constitute significant social sites for both enabling and thwarting abuse; the quality of third-party responses shapes contexts that are more or less conducive or resistant to abuse. In this sense, "domestic violence . . . is bred of many interactions, not just the one that transpires between the person who inflicts injury and the one who sustains it" (Baumgartner, 1993, p. 228). The importance of informal third parties begins with the presence of third parties during episodes of abuse and continues with their role as first port of call, which in turn shapes trajectories of healing, recovery, and redress. Informal third parties, in different ways, are positioned toward the conduits of power and influence in families, communities, and workplaces and may be able to marshal emotional, symbolic, and material resources from which victims or perpetrators can benefit.

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To address these issues, diverse informal third-party actions are examined in conjunction. It is hoped that the reader will gain a better understanding of their breadth, variety, and combined impact on both victims and perpetrators. Ideally, this will contribute to knowledge based on a critical appreciation of empirical evidence, confident of the evidence's ability to reflect real, lived experience, yet mindful that what we see reflected in research also depends on the conceptual frameworks used to interpret data.

The book is directed at advanced students in the social and health sciences, but it may also be of interest for professionals in these fields and others who are interested in a fresh perspective on the social context of abuse and its prevention. The primary reason for writing it was recognition that informal third parties are more important to intervention than they have been given credit for. This refers to their role in supporting victims and to their equally important but more problematic role in siding with perpetrators. Although there now is considerable evidence on informal responses, on the whole they have remained in the shadow of other topics of research. Most of the research examined here is from Anglo-Saxon countries, in particular the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, but research from other countries is included as well. No formal framework for cross-national comparison is used, but the evidence suggests that informal responses are an important issue in many different countries.

THEMATIC SCOPE

Most of the empirical studies considered in this book focus on informal responses to sexual and domestic violence against women of childbearing age perpetrated by men in the context of sexual or family relationships (Holder, 1998; Kelly, 1996; Ullman, 2010). This research documented a range of informal third-party

actions including the responses of witnesses to ongoing or immi-
nent assaults (see Chapter 4), responses to victims' disclosure
and help-seeking (Chapter 5), and responses to, or relationships
with, perpetrators (Chapter 6). This empirical material spans four
decades of research from 1977 to 2011. Also included is some of
the ethnographic research in societies in which rape and domestic
violence appear to be extremely rare.

Informal responses are likely to also matter in relation to other
patterns of abuse including abuse in gay and lesbian relationships
(Bornstein et al., 2006; Oringher & Samuelson, 2011), rape of
men by other men (Vearnals & Campbell, 2001), abuses in institu-
tions (Gasch, 2010), and child sexual abuse (Arata, 1998; Bottoms,
Rudnicki, & Epstein, 2007). However, the social and institutional
contexts in which these patterns of abuse occur vary consider-
ably, including the role of age differences and homophobia, and
although there may be similarities across contexts, the present
discussion focuses primarily on informal responses to sexual and
domestic abuse against women of childbearing age in heterosexual
relationships. There are several reasons for this focus.

Women of childbearing age are the population group world-
wide most at risk for sexual and domestic abuse (Reed et al., 2010).
They and their children suffer most of the health consequences of
domestic violence, ranging from injury, stress-related trauma, and
chronic disease to reproductive health problems and poor child
health (Ellsberg et al., 2008; Martinez et al. 2006). In addition,
quite a lot is known about the range of social contexts in which
sexual and domestic abuses occur and the compounding effects
of poverty and racism (Goodman et al., 2009; Sokoloff & Pratt,
2005). There also is evidence, ironically, of sociocultural contexts
in which the rape and beating of women appear to be rare or
nonexistent (Counts et al., 1999; Watson-Franke, 2002). Finally,
formal interventions in rape and domestic violence against women

are relatively well developed, in particular with regard to victim-support services and criminal justice measures (Hanmer et al., 2006; Hester & Westmarland, 2005; Humphreys et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2005). Thus, there are best-practice frameworks for service delivery and other formal interventions that can put the prevention potential of informal responses into perspective.

INFORMAL THIRD PARTIES AS A FIRST PORT OF CALL

Empirical studies routinely find that most victims turn to social network members first, and most never engage formal services. Informal third parties are often the first and, in many cases, the only people who know of abuse, which makes the quality of their responses particularly important for the further course of recovery and redress. When formal third parties do not become involved at all, informal responses are the only potential source of support and intervention.

In the United States, Fisher et al. (2003) found that female college students disclosed sexual assault mostly to informal third parties. Only 2% of victims reported sexual violence to police, 4% reported it to campus authorities, and yet 70% told somebody else. Of those who told somebody else, 88% told a friend, 10% a family member, and 8% an intimate (1% told counseling services; percentages exceed 100 because multiple responses were possible). Kaukinen and DeMaris (2009) conducted a reanalysis of the National Survey on Violence Against Women in the United States and found that 73% asked family, friends, or neighbors for help; 27% reported the assault to police.

In Britain, early studies had shown that women who were experiencing domestic violence approached family and friends, in particular mothers, about three times as often as they approached formal systems such as the police (Kelly, 1996). More recently, Povey

et al. (2009) also found that more victims of sexual or domestic violence report to informal third parties than to police. In the 2009–10 British Crime Survey, 38% of victims of serious sexual assault told no one about it; 62% told someone (Smith et al., 2011). Whom did they tell? Victims most often confided in friends, relatives, or neighbors: 45% of those victims who disclosed at all (or 28% of all victims surveyed); 11% of those who told anyone reported the assault to police (or 7% of all victims surveyed; 93% of assaults were not reported to police) (Smith et al., 2011).

Only a few women who experience abuse find their way to support services or formal authorities. For the United States, Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour (1992) found that 16% of victims told police; 26% told a doctor. Low reporting rates were also found more recently: In a national sample of women, 16% of rapes were reported to police; in a sample of college women, 12% of rapes were reported to police (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Reasons for not reporting to police included not wanting others to know, lack of proof, fear of reprisal by perpetrator, and fear of secondary victimization through the criminal justice system (Fisher et al., 2003). Suspicion of the criminal justice system is another reason not to report, in particular where law enforcement is seen as racist and ineffective (Hamby, 2008).

Other studies found that rape victims are least likely to disclose to formal providers including police, physicians, and rape crisis centers (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Ullman, 1996, 2000). In a study of rape survivors who had disclosed the rape, three-quarters of the first confidantes were informal third parties (Ahrens et al., 2007). Survivors most commonly told a friend (38.2%) or a family member (22.5%); and less often they told their partners (5.9%), a co-worker (3.9%), a neighbor (3.9%), or a stranger (2.9%). Only 15% of first disclosures were to formal third parties such as police (5.9%), doctor (4.9%), therapist (2.9%), or clergy (1.0). Slightly

less than 10% of the women told no one (which makes this study one of several in which disclosure in the context of research was the first time the victim told anybody. For some victims the first-ever disclosure is in research; reasons are guilt, shame, and fear of not being believed, especially if a boyfriend is the rapist) (Ullman, 2010).

If women survivors seek support from specialized services such as rape crisis centers or domestic violence projects, they typically are very satisfied with the support they receive, but only a small percentage of women access these services. One basic problem still is that, even though excellent services exist, they tend to cluster in urban areas; for too many victims, specialized services may be too far away (Coy, Kelly, & Foord, 2007). At the same time, access to services and the pathways by which victims reach rape crisis centers or domestic violence projects may also change over time as availability of services, public awareness of them, and referral practices among formal third parties change. In the late 1980s, Golding et al. (1989) found that 1.9% of rape victims had turned to a rape crisis center (16.1% to a mental health professional), but among all formal services, rape crisis centers were most often named as helpful – a dilemma documented repeatedly: The frequent accessing of services does not mean users found them effective or satisfying (Hamilton & Coates, 1993). Around the same time, George, Winfield, and Blazer (1992) reported for two urban United States samples that 5% of sexual assault victims sought help from a rape crisis center, whereas 27% turned to a psychiatrist or mental health counselor. In 2009, Kaukinen and DeMaris reported that 4.7% of sexual assault victims had contacted a social service agency (unspecified) and 9.4% had been referred to specialized victim services by police. The dilemma that few victims can benefit from excellent service may be most pronounced with regard to specialized victim services but can also