

# *Theorizing Public Housing Woman Abuse as a Function of Economic Exclusion and Male Peer Support*

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*The physical, sexual and psychological abuse of women in intimate relationships cuts across all sociodemographic groups. However, women who are socially and economically disenfranchised, such as those who live in urban public housing estates, report much higher rates of such victimization than do their more affluent counterparts. Still, a review of the literature on violence against women reveals a conspicuous absence of in-depth theoretical work on key areas related to class. The main objective of this paper, then, is to provide an economic exclusion/male peer support model of woman abuse in North American public housing, one that takes social and economic marginalization seriously.*

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[F]eminists have dealt inadequately with the question of whether some women are **more** vulnerable than others. Eager to repudiate class and race-biased analyses of abuse, we have promoted universal risk arguments, criticizing methodologies that define some women as more vulnerable than others. But this refutation of classism and racism obscures our ability to wrestle with this question of vulnerability and therefore eligibility criteria (Fine, 1985, p. 397, emphasis in original).

Only a few social scientific areas of inquiry have moved as far and as fast as the study of male-to- female physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Only 30 years ago, a comprehensive bibliography of North American sources on wife beating would fit on an index card (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1988). Today, hundreds of journal articles, scores of books, and several important journals specifically address a variety of forms of woman abuse. We now have rich empirical information and a wide

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variety of theories on woman abuse in a variety of relationships and social settings, making it clear that living in conditions of tyranny is a dangerous attack on a woman's psychological as well as physical health (Mattley & Schwartz, 1990). Still, reading the extant literature makes it clear that we have not yet carefully examined key areas related to social class, especially the abuse of economically marginalized women in North American urban public housing.

Perhaps this neglect may be rooted in feminist challenges of the myth that only poor women are targets of abuse (Schwartz, 1988), or perhaps from fear that research on class "will be misused by bigots" (Ptacek, 1999, p. 33). Others just don't believe that female public housing residents are victimized. For example, a social worker at a public meeting explained: "...there isn't as much domestic violence in public housing because the women living in public housing projects actually live alone with their children and men aren't allowed to be there" (cited in Raphael, 2001a, p. 699). There are other explanations for the marginalization of both poverty issues and public housing residents in the literature on woman abuse; but they are described in detail elsewhere (see Ptacek, 1999). Here, the main objective is to provide an economic exclusion/male peer support model of woman abuse in North American urban public housing.

## **THE NEED TO THEORIZE WOMAN ABUSE IN NORTH AMERICAN PUBLIC HOUSING**

Menard (2001, p. 708) is one of many feminist scholars and activists who correctly points out that in Canada and the U.S., woman abuse "occurs in all demographic and social groups, cutting across age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and economic circumstances." However, recent studies show that women in North American urban public housing projects, living under conditions of poverty, seem to suffer from intimate violence at a greater rate than many other women, even though relatively few of them live in traditional marital relationships (Holzman & Piper, 1998). As Holzman, Hyatt and Dempster's (2001, p. 665) recent study shows, "demographic, economic, and geographic factors associated with high incidence of violent victimization of women appear to find a nexus in public housing."

Consider some of the results of the Quality of Neighborhood Life Survey (QNLS). Administered to residents of six public housing estates in the west end of a metropolitan center in Canada, the QNLS used a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS-2, Straus et al., 1996) to elicit data on female victimization in intimate relationships. Of

the 216 women who filled it out, 19.3% stated that in the year before the study they were harmed by one or more of the physical violence items in Table 1 (DeKeseredy et al., 1999).

**Table I. Intimate Physical Violence Against Women**

**Incidence Rates**

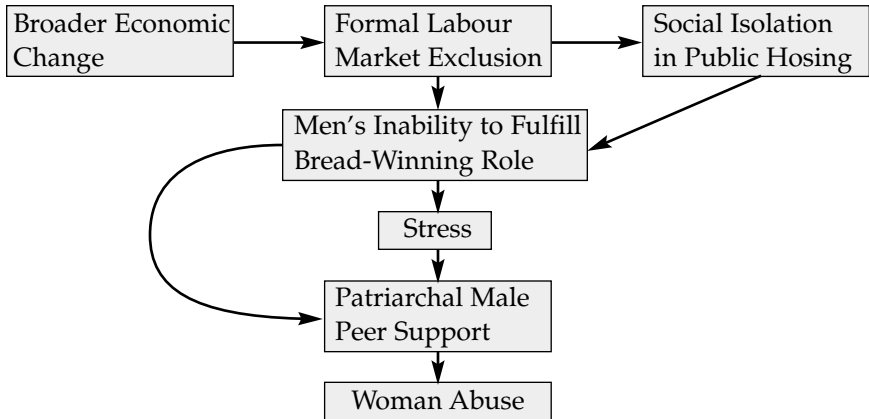
Physical Violence	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Grab you	26	14.5	153	85.5
Push or shove you	25	14.0	154	86.0
Throw something at you that could hurt	6	3.4	172	96.6
Slap you	11	6.2	166	93.8
Twist your arm or pull your hair	10	5.6	169	94.4
Kick you	7	3.9	171	96.1
Punch or hit you with something that could hurt	5	2.8	173	97.2
Slam you against a wall	8	4.5	169	95.5
Choke you	4	2.2	174	97.8
Burn or scald you on purpose	0	0.0	178	100.0
Beat you up	6	3.4	171	96.6
Use a knife or gun on you	1	0.6	176	99.4

This figure is much higher than those recently elicited by large-scale North American representative sample surveys of the general population. For example, the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that 1.9% of U.S. women reported having been victimized by any of the physical assault CTS items (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), which are similar to those presented in Table 1. It may be that this lower estimate may stem from presenting the NVAWS to respondents as a "crime study," which means that many people will not report violence unless they personally label them as "criminal" (Koss, 1996; Schwartz, 2000). Still, the QNLS figure is higher than those elicited by large-scale U.S. and Canadian woman abuse surveys that do not have the above emphasis and which used some version of the CTS to measure male violence against married/cohabiting women in a one-year time period. For example, Kennedy and Dutton's (1989) Alberta survey found 11.2% victimization, while Straus and Gelles' (1986) second national family violence survey elicited an estimate of 11.3%. Even here, the possibility exists that the much higher victimization found in public housing is still too low, as Renzetti and Maier (2002) discovered in a more in-depth

qualitative study of 36 Camden, New Jersey women, where 50% reported victimization. Our conclusion is that North American urban female public housing residents suffer from higher rates of physical abuse than women in the general population. Unfortunately, as Raphael (2001a, p. 700) points out, "public housing, like welfare benefits, may... be a magnet for abusers who would otherwise be homeless and may attract abusive partners to women in public housing."

Why do female public housing residents experience more violent threats to their health and well-being than women in the general population? Certainly, while it is important to know the extent of woman abuse in public housing in order to develop useful social support services for victims, we also need to identify the major sources of this problem to develop effective prevention and control strategies. Further, as Raphael (2001b, p. 454) reminds us, although this field is in its infancy, the empirical work done so far "makes it clear that economic variables need to be better incorporated into the current theoretical mix than they have been heretofore."

Economic exclusion and the role of patriarchal male peer support are major components of the theoretical model described in Figure 1, which is a modified version of Sernau's (2001, p. 24) Web of Exclusion Model. Heavily informed by sociological perspectives offered by him, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993), Wilson (1996) and Young (1999), this model argues that recent major economic transformations in North America (e.g., the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy) displaces working class men and women who often end up in urban public housing or other "clusters of poverty" (Sernau, 2001). Unable to economically support their families and live up to their culturally defined role as bread winner, socially and economically excluded men experience high levels of life events stress because "their normal paths for personal power and prestige have been cut off" (Raphael, 2001a). Such stress prompts them to seek social support from male peers with similar problems. Such support may help men resolve intimate relationship problems or facilitate the management of their stress, "but there are no guarantees that such a resolution is free of cost" (Vaux, 1985, p. 102). As demonstrated by studies of woman abuse in courtship (e.g., DeKeseredy, 1988a; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997), male peer support may alleviate dating life events stress, but it can also have negative consequences for the health and safety of women. For example, DeKeseredy (1998b) found that for men with high levels of such stress, social ties with abusive peers were strongly related to woman abuse in Canadian college dating. Similarly, patriarchal male peer support in public housing promotes sexual assault and other highly injurious "macho activities" (Raphael, 2001a).



**Figure 1. Economic Exclusion/Male Peer Support Model**

## BROADER ECONOMIC CHANGE

Canada and the U.S. have always been class societies but they are “becoming more extreme and less gentle” (Forcese, 1997, p. ix), especially since the last quarter of the twentieth century (Young, 1999). For instance, since the mid 1970s, poverty rates have increased substantially in many urban sections of North America, due in large part to the disappearance of manufacturing jobs (Wilson, 1996). Today, a record high number of North Americans live in a continent where there is “plenty in the midst of poverty” (Gordon, 1999, p. 13) and where, in 1999, U.S. automobile manufacturers accumulated a profit of \$18 billion with the help of half a million fewer workers than they had 20 years ago (White, 2001). Note, too, that in 2000, 234,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared in the U.S. and even more will be lost in the near future (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2002). For example, on January 29, 2001, DaimlerChrysler, which accounts for four percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, announced the elimination of 26,000 Chrysler jobs (White, 2001). Further, in 2001, U.S. factory payroll jobs fell by 1.3 million, 133,000 of which were lost in December of that year (Berry, 2002; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

The relatively “new assault” on workers is mainly the result of a series of fairly familiar factors: the rise of the “contingent” work force; the outmigration of people who can afford to flee poor urban communities; transnational or “highly mobile supranational corporations” moving to developing countries to use cheap labour and to take advantage of weak environmental and work place safety laws; the “suburbanization of employment;” the implementation of high technology in workplaces; and the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy (Kazempur &

Halli, 2000; Krivo, Peterson, Rizzo, & Reynolds, 1998; Ranney & Schwalb, 2001; Wilson, 1987; 1996; Zielenbach, 2000).

What motivated these structural changes? Neo-conservative scholars and analysts, as well as companies like Tate & Lyle, contend that they are functions of increased global competition. However, Ranney and Schwalb (2001), argue that the real cause is a global crisis generated by the reorganization of old Bretton Woods institutions (e.g., International Monetary Fund), the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the replacement of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade with the World Trade Organization. Ranney and Schwalb (2001, p. 2) refer to these new policies as a “global development policy,” which “opens up all nations to imports, and corporate investment.” Regardless of how one labels these policies, the result has been to exclude a substantial number of North Americans from the labour market.

## FORMAL LABOUR MARKET EXCLUSION

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks not only killed thousands, but also exacerbated North America’s economic problems. Of course, the North American economy was already experiencing a major crisis. Even so, North Americans constantly heard that “the economy has never been better” or that they “never had it so good” (Young, 1999). This may be the case for high-ranking multinational corporate executives like Bill Gates, but for those at the bottom end of the socioeconomic ladder, things could hardly be much worse.

Indeed, these people are the victims of a “massive hemorrhaging of full-time employment” spawned by the above global crisis (Taylor, 1999, p. 13). Consider the following recent Canadian data:

- The proportion of the workforce working full-time fell from 72.2% in 1989 to 65.5% in 1998 and has continued to drop.
- Of those people who are working, over 52% earns less than \$15 (Can) per hour (less than US\$10 per hour).
- 3.2 million Canadians (about one-fifth of the labour force) were unemployed or significantly underemployed – More than twice the official unemployment rate.
- Only 40% of the jobs created in 1998 were full-time.
- About 45% of workers between the ages 25 and 69 have less than full-time employment, and these workers have few opportunities to improve their earning power.
- 53% of adult workers (6.7 million) are in employment situations that are vulnerable because of lack of job stability or the low rate of pay, or both (Osachoff, 1999, pp. 1-2).

Many U.S. citizens are also excluded from the labour force, especially those that are blue-collar workers. For example, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001) data show that 93,000 factory jobs were eliminated in September 2001, which was the 14th consecutive month of such job losses. Further, 41,000 service industry jobs were cut and seven million people were unemployed during the same time period. Some people may contend that these figures are the result of the September 11 "attack on America." However, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001, p.1), "it is likely that the events of September 11 had little effect on the September employment and unemployment rates." Note, too, that there was a steady decline in employment since the mid 1970s, which has helped create many urban "institutional ghettos," where "most adults... are not working in a typical week" (Wilson, 1996, p. xiii).

## SOCIAL ISOLATION IN PUBLIC HOUSING

Job losses are not the only result of these policy developments. A related factor is an increase in North American inner-city poverty rates. For example, Table 2 shows that except for Ottawa-Hull, the concentration of poor families in Canada's largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) has increased considerably since 1980. Table 3 shows a similar trend exists with Canadian neighborhood poverty rates. Thus, Canada is experiencing something like what Wacquant (1994, 1996) and Taylor (1999, p. 31) refer to as "a distinctive new process of 'hyper-ghettoization' – the development of discrete urban territories where the mass of residents are permanently excluded from legitimate employment..."

**Table II. The Increasing Concentration of Poor Families**

Census Metropolitan Area	Concentration of Poor 1980	Concentration of Poor 1990	Concentration of Poor 1995
Montreal	30.1%	40.1%	40.2%
Winnipeg	23.5%	39.0%	36.1%
Toronto	14.7%	21.4%	29.8%
Ottawa-Hull	27.5%	24.1%	28.4%
Hamilton	21.6%	24.9%	27.9%
Quebec City	20.8%	26.6%	25.3%
Edmonton	4.1%	28.3%	18.8%
Vancouver	7.2%	15.5%	13.7%
Calgary	6.4%	20.3%	8.7%

*Source:* Hatfield (1999).

**Table III. Increasing Neighbourhood Poverty Rates**

Census Metropolitan Area	Neighborhood Poverty Rate 1980	Neighborhood Poverty Rate 1990	Neighborhood Poverty Rate 1995
Montreal	14.0	20.4	21.3
Winnipeg	9.0	15.7	14.0
Toronto	4.7	7.9	13.6
Ottawa-Hull	10.0	8.4	10.4
Hamilton	8.1	7.9	10.8
Quebec City	9.0	11.2	11.2
Edmonton	1.6	12.8	7.8
Vancouver	2.5	6.1	6.7
Calgary	2.2	8.9	3.5

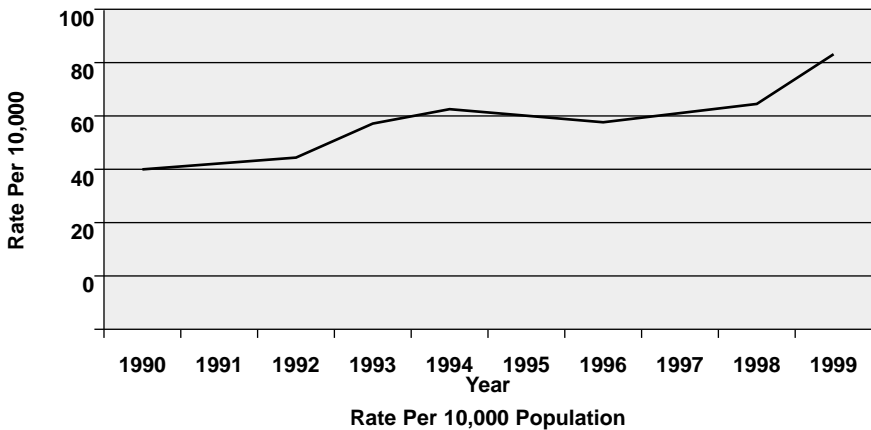
*Source:* Hatfield (1999).

Rates of concentrated urban poverty have also increased dramatically in U.S. inner cities, especially in older metropolitan areas of the Northeast and Midwest (Abramson, Tobin, & Vandergoot, 1995; Hajnal, 1995; Wilson, 1987, 1996; Zielenbach, 2000). For example, between 1970 and 1990, the number of U.S. people living in urban ghettos, barrios, and slums grew from 4.1 million to eight million (Jargowsky, 1997). Not surprisingly, an increase in joblessness and urban poverty, together with skyrocketing housing costs in cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Boston, precludes many people from buying or renting a home. For example, in the U.S., 46% of all states, 54% of all urban areas, and 49% of all local jurisdictions, at least 40% of the population cannot afford the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment (Menard, 2001; Twombly, Pitcoff, Dolbeare, & Crowley, 2000). Thus, if they do not end up living on the streets, the growing "lumpenproletarian fraction of the working class" may be forced to live in public housing estates for the rest of their lives (Taylor, 1999, p. 117). Currently, 1,170,444 U.S. households are assisted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's public housing program (National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, 2001).

As work continues to disappear and as government support for large-scale businesses strengthens, the need to live in public housing also increases. As described in Figure 2, Ontario is witnessing a major rise in the number of people on public housing wait lists because they cannot afford market rent that skyrocketed after the neo-conservative provincial government led by Premier Mike Harris eliminated rent control. According to the Ontario Social Development Council and the Social



Planning Network of Ontario (OSDC & SPNO, 2000), this waiting list “is the worst” of their 12 quality of life indicators.



**Figure 2. Ontario Public Housing Wait Lists, 1990-99**

*Source:* Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2000).

Some scholars (e.g., Venkatesh, 2000) refer to public housing estates as “cities-within-cities” which are purposely concentrated in high poverty metropolitan areas. Clustering the poor together in such areas is a strategy that: exacerbates their stigmatization and inability to find work; intensifies spatial poverty, crime, and other social pathologies (e.g., drug use); facilitates the withdrawal of government and private sector capital from these neighborhoods (Leavitt & Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995; Massey & Kanaiaupuni, 1993), and perpetuates racial/ethnic segregation and isolation (Kazempur & Halli, 2000; Massey & Denton, 1993; Santiago, Galster, & Tatian, 1999).

An example of how public housing contributes to social and economic isolation is provided below by a Chicago-based employer interviewed by Wilson (1996, p. 116). He feels that people who live in Chicago’s Cabrini Green housing project and other places like it would jeopardize his ability to accumulate profit:

I necessarily can’t tell from looking at an address whether someone’s from Cabrini Green or not, but if I could tell, I don’t think I’d want to hire them. Because it reflects on your credibility. If you came here with this survey, and you were from one of those neighborhoods, I don’t know if I’d want to answer your questions. I’d wonder about your credibility.

Some employers, as William Julius Wilson (1996) discovered, believe public housing residents and people who live in other “bad areas” are more prone to stealing, missing work, and drinking than those from “good areas.” Of course, not every employer shares this view and many employers will hire public housing residents for low wages. Still, due to the suburbanization of employment, many currently available low paying jobs are located far away from inner-city housing estates. Thus, how can you work when you can’t afford to get to work? Rather than suffering from a “certain lack of get-up-and-go,” one of the main reasons why people who participated in the QNLS, Ehrenreich’s (2001) study, and Wilson’s (1996) research find it very difficult to get and/or keep a job is that they typically don’t have cars or belong to a social network that provides organized car pools. Some socially and economically marginalized people have automobiles, but they have to pay higher gas prices and higher insurance premiums than do suburbanites (Ehrenreich, 2001). Consequently, as pointed out by a mother of three children interviewed by Wilson (1996, p. 41), “You spending more getting to the suburbs to work than you is getting paid, so you still ain’t getting nowhere.”

In sum, living in public housing is isolating and precludes people from getting jobs that enable them to leave these centers of concentrated disadvantage. Similar factors also limit many male residents from being “good providers” (Sernau, 2001).

### **MEN’S INABILITY TO FULFILL BREAD-WINNING ROLE**

Again, many jobless people live in public housing estates. For example, close to 90% of those who reside in the Robert Taylor Homes and other Chicago high-rise public housing buildings are unemployed (Venkatesh, 2000). Further, although government statistics show that most of the North American public housing households (about three out of every four in the U.S.) are female-headed, some include married couples and many are homes to “long-term male guests” who are not found in government records (Holzman & Piper, 1998). Regardless of whether they are married or cohabiting with women, although the precise number is unknown, many male public housing residents and their female partners believe that men should live up to the culturally defined role of bread-winner, as do a substantial number of men and women in other socioeconomic groups (Raphael, 2001a; Sernau, 2001). This belief is a function of

adhering to the ideology of familial patriarchy (male domination in the family), and men who have a meager income, are less educated, and who are only able to hold low-status jobs are more likely to adhere to this ideology than their more affluent counterparts (Smith, 1990). Similarly, many poor women believe that “your husband should be able to provide for you and if he can’t, what is he doing marrying you in the first place?” (cited in Edin, 2000, p. 118).

Unfortunately, a large number of male public housing residents cannot provide for their families. On top of dealing with this problem and others related to social and economic exclusion, since their names are not generally on the lease, many unemployed men are evicted from their homes because their partners view them as irresponsible and/or they cannot afford to house and feed them. According to an African-American Camden woman interviewed by Edin (2000, p. 119):

It was like a struggle going on inside of me. I mean, he lost his job at the auto body shop when they went [bankrupt] and closed down. Then he couldn’t find another one. But it was months and months. I was trying to live on my welfare check and it just wasn’t enough. Finally, I couldn’t do it anymore [because] it was just too much pressure on me [even though] he is the love of my life. I told him he had to leave, even though I knew it wasn’t really his fault that [he wasn’t working]. But I had nothing in the house to feed the kids, no money to pay the bills. Nothing. And he was just sitting there, not working. I couldn’t take it, so I made him leave.

When men (not only those who live in public housing), cannot provide for their families, are evicted for not obeying their partners’ “pay and stay” rule (Edin, 2000), and cannot control their partners through economic means, they experience considerable stress, similar to that described below by one of Rubin’s (1994, p. 219) unemployed interviewees:

I was just so mad about what happened; it was like the world came crashing down on me. I did a little too much drinking, and then I’d just crawl into a hole, wouldn’t even know whether Marianne or the kids were there or not. She kept saying it was like I wasn’t there. I guess she was right, because I sure didn’t want to be there, not if I couldn’t support them.

## STRESS

Stress arises when male public housing residents appraise particular marital/cohabiting life events as “threatening or otherwise demanding” and do not have “appropriate coping responses” (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 312). For example, regardless of whether they are evicted by their female partners, many economically displaced males who cannot meet the responsibilities of being the “man of the household” feel deprived of intimate and social support resources that give them “self-worth” (Harris & Bologh, 1985). They also experience stress due to their partners’ threats to the kind of authority that a patriarchal culture has led them to expect by virtue of being male (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). For example, poor urban women are not simply passive victims of patriarchal domination and control (Edin, 2000; Miller, 2001). Rather, a growing number of them are creating autonomy for themselves and their “sisters” (Bourgois, 1995). Recall that some of Edin’s (2000) respondents evicted their unemployed partners. This behavior and other examples of “inverting patriarchy” (Bourgois, 1995), such as making the financial decisions for the household and having the lease and the car in the woman’s name are often perceived by patriarchal men as “dramatic assaults” on their “sense of masculine dignity” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 215).

Some men deal with their partners’ inversions of patriarchy by leaving them, while others use violence as a means of sabotaging women’s attempts to gain economic independence (Bourgois, 1995; Raphael, 2001b). For example, women who have obtained better economic resources through welfare reform are at greater risk of being abused because their male partners fear that the women will be able to leave them or meet a more attractive, financially secure man in the workplace (Raphael, 2001a, 2001b). In fact, social service providers are now hearing many reports of women who are stalked or assaulted by their economically disenfranchised partners in their workplaces as a means of making them lose their jobs and economic independence (Raphael, 2001a). Note, too, that Tolman and Rosen’s (2001) study of 753 women found that male violence deters women from participating in the paid labour market and that the rates of such abuse for women on welfare is higher than those obtained from national representative sample surveys. Hence, many abused female public housing residents, like other poor battered women, are forced to return to their violent partners out of economic necessity (McCloskey, 1996; Moreno, El-Bassell, Gilbert, & Wada, 2002).

Other men turn to their male peers for advice and guidance on how to

alleviate stress caused by female challenges to patriarchal authority (DeKeseredy, 1988a), and there are a sizeable number of such patriarchal sources of social support in and around public housing estates (Raphael, 2001a). There are also numerous opportunities to interact with male peers because most of the men who live in public housing estates are also unemployed and spend a considerable amount of time “talking about hard times with other men” in public places (Sernau, 2001, p. 135).

## Patriarchal Male Peer Support

Patriarchal male peer support refers to “the attachments to male peers and the resources that these men provide which perpetuate and legitimate woman abuse” (DeKeseredy, 1990, p. 130). The bulk of the empirical work on this problem has thus far focused primarily on the ways in which college all-male social networks contribute to various types of male-to-female assaults in dating (e.g., Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). For example, Schwartz et al., (2001) found that men who drink two or more times a week and have male peer support for both emotional and physical violence are almost ten times as likely to abuse women than men who do not drink or have this support. However, recently a few researchers have generated primarily qualitative data strongly suggesting that many abusive men “left stranded by the needs of capital on housing estates” (Young, 2001, p. 2) are in the same way heavily influenced by men in similar situations to “lash out against the women... they can no longer control” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 214). Again, there are large numbers of socially and economically excluded male peers in and around public housing complexes, and many of them view wife beating, rape, and other forms of male-to-female victimization as legitimate and effective means of repairing “damaged patriarchal masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 1993; Raphael, 2001a). Further, not only do these men publicly define woman abuse as a legitimate way of maintaining patriarchal authority and control, they also serve as role models because many of them beat their own intimate partners.

Of course, many male public housing residents are not emotionally attached to women have no intention of pursuing a conventional family life. This does not mean that they are immune from being exposed to and influenced by patriarchal male peers. For example, many single, unemployed inner-city men become heavily integrated into peer groups that pressure them to be sexually active, brag about their sexual encounters, and reward them for “getting over the sexual defenses of women” (Anderson, 1999; p. 147; Wilson, 1996). These groups are similar to the college-based “hypererotic” male subcultures identified by Kanin

(1967). Such subcultures produce high or exaggerated levels of sexual aspiration and members expect to frequently have consensual sexual intercourse. Sill, for most men, regardless of their social class position, this goal is almost impossible to achieve (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Moreover, if their peers see them as failures with women, they will face group ridicule and experience sexual frustration caused by a "reference-group-anchored sex drive" (Anderson, 1999; Kanin, 1967). Hence, they are more likely to engage in predatory sexual conduct (e.g., rape) to regain status as sexually active males among their peers, or to meet what might be termed "masculinity challenges" (Messerschmidt, 2000). The most important people in many inner-city male youths' lives are their peers (Anderson, 1999), and the more sex they have, the more esteem is accrued to them. Like college and professional athletes who participate in gang rape, the sexual assaults committed by male public housing residents have much more to do with their need to sustain their status among their peers than their need to satisfy their sexual urges (Benedict, 1998; Godenzi, Schwartz, & DeKeseredy, 2001).

One problem with the above argument is that it is impossible to believe that men with high sexual expectations who force women to have sex can somehow justify their behavior as a legitimate "conquest." When they are using physical violence and are participating in gang rapes, they must be aware that this behavior will be defined as deviant or criminal not only by other men, but also by the criminal justice system. However, like college-based male peer support groups, inner-city all-male alliances provide their members with a vocabulary that defines victims as legitimate targets of abuse (Kanin, 1967; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Consider Primo, a young man who dealt crack in East Harlem. He told Felipe Bourgois (1995) that some of the women that he and his friends' gang raped enjoyed being targets of sexual violence and were "worthy victims." Rape myths are also espoused by disenfranchised all-male alliances and these myths help members maintain their own images of themselves as normal, respectable men (Kanin, 1967). In the words of Primo, "You gotta understand Felipe, even when they say no, they're loving it" (cited in Bourgois, 1995, p. 210).

Intimate relationship stress, then, is not necessarily a requisite for men interacting with male peers or receiving male peer support for woman abuse (DeKeseredy, 1988a). As stated above, there are cases in which factors other than stress characteristic of male-female dynamics, such as leisure and criminal activities, integrate men with other male public housing residents who encourage woman abuse. These are, according to Bowker (1983, p. 136), "violence-supporting social relations [that] may occur at any time and any place."

## CONCLUSIONS

Since 1970, the rate of concentrated urban poverty has increased significantly in both Canada and the U.S. Not surprisingly, this problem has exacerbated a host of social pathologies (Kriwo et al., 1998), such as drug dealing and interpersonal violence. Unfortunately, we live in an “exclusive society” where more and more people are becoming “casualties of globalization and the new technology” (Young, 2001, p. 13). Given the explosive growth in literature available on crime and other social problems that plague impoverished North American urban communities, it is somewhat surprising that little social scientific attention has been devoted to studying and theorizing male physical, sexual, and psychological assaults on women who reside in these neighborhoods. Of course, woman abuse and other brutal outcomes of patriarchy and hypermasculinity resonate far out of ghettos and public housing estates (Young, 2001). Nevertheless, male-to-female victimization is more common among those who live in these marginalized locations and thus it is important to recognize class differences in woman abuse.

Why do women in public housing experience higher rates of abuse than their more affluent counterparts? This paper offers a theoretical model that combines both macro and micro-level factors, such as formal labour market exclusion and patriarchal male peer support. The perspective we offer here is not a predictive model. Rather, like DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s (1993) male peer support model and Godenzi et al.’s (2001) gendered social bond/male peer support theory, it is a heuristic perspective and does not attempt to isolate specific offenders. Still, unlike most woman abuse theories developed so far, it attempts to explain how broader economic changes (e.g., deindustrialization) that have occurred in recent decades contribute to one of North America’s most pressing social problems. Further, the model presented in Figure 1 responds to the calls for moving the experiences of those whom William Julius Wilson (1987) refers to as the “truly disadvantaged” to the center of empirical and theoretical work on the ways in which all-male social networks perpetuate and legitimate woman abuse (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998b). To date, almost all male peer support theories focus exclusively on undergraduate members of patriarchal subcultures despite evidence such as that presented here showing that there are socially and economically disenfranchised male peer groups outside universities that also use sexist or abusive means of doing masculinity.

Although the economic exclusion/male peer support model fills several gaps in the theoretical literature on woman abuse, like any social

scientific perspective, it can be improved. For example, consistent with male peer support theories of woman abuse on campus (e.g., DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993), Figure 1 does not specifically address whether members of patriarchal male peer support groups are intentionally recruited into these alliances or whether they gravitate to such groups as a way of selectively attempting to sustain or receive support for their earlier acquired values and behavior. Further, it does not specify that men may interact with and be influenced by peers who live away from public housing. Another point to consider is that like every other male peer support model racial/ethnic variations in male peer support dynamics remain to be examined. Hopefully, future theoretical work on the relationship between economic factors, male peer support and woman abuse in North American public housing will address these and other shortcomings.



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