❑ STEPHANIE PATERSON
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

(Re)Constructing women's resistance to woman abuse: Resources, strategy choice and implications of and for public policy in Canada

Abstract
While there has been considerable attention paid to Canada's anti-woman abuse policy framework, much of this attention has neglected its implications for women's resistance to abuse. This paper attempts to address this gap by using the lens of women's resistance to analyse the anti-woman abuse policy in Canada. I begin by exploring the ways in which the policy framework constructs the 'problem' and considering its implications for women's choice in resistance strategy. Using the Canadian General Social Survey on Victimization (1999), I apply independent samples tests to explore women's (non)usage of various strategies, as it varies by class, race, and ability. I conclude with suggestions for policy reform.

Key words: domestic violence, gender policy

Feminist scholarship has devoted considerable attention to Canada's anti-woman abuse policy framework (for an excellent overview of this literature, see Vickers, 2002). This scholarship has pointed out the gendered implications of a gender-neutral policy framework, the limits of the criminal justice system in addressing woman abuse, including its disarticulation from other forms of violence, and the systemic and structural bases of abuse, which are not currently accounted for in the policy framework. The contribution of this paper is to consider the anti-violence policy framework from the lens of women's resistance. In particular, I seek to uncover its implications for women's choice in resistance strategy. I begin by considering the 'problem' as it is constructed in Canadian public policy. Then, using data from the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization, I consider the variety of resistance strategies that women employ when seeking to eliminate violence from their lives. Finally, women's patterns of resistance are analysed, as shaped by age,

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race and culture, and ability. Here consideration is given not only to why women use a particular strategy, but also to why they *do not* use particular strategies, explained in reference to the analysis laid out in the first section. While there is a tendency to hold abused women accountable for their situation, the main assertion of the present study is that resistance is not a question of women's agency, but rather a question of policy. Although this analysis is focused exclusively on the Canadian example, it has important cross-national implications for policy design and service delivery, especially in those areas relying heavily on a 'one size fits all' approach to anti-violence policy (see UNDFW, 2003 for an overview of national responses to violence against women).

Canadian anti-woman abuse policy and problem representation

Although anti-violence policy in Canada is somewhat fragmented by the federal system of government, where responsibility is divided between federal and provincial governments, there are common policy types employed, including criminal justice, social services, and awareness and education. These commonalities enable the conceptualization of a Canadian framework, which includes inputs from federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, and has two orientations, including criminalization and public health (for an overview of anti-woman abuse policy, see the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice, 2003). The public health orientation is aimed at research and awareness, but to date, most money has been allocated towards research, with little targeted to awareness or other services that might otherwise benefit families (Burt and Mitchell, 1998; Greaves et al., 1995). By far, the main pillar of the policy framework is the criminal justice system, which includes a few important initiatives and which receives the most funding (Greaves et al., 1995). In Canada, police and courts are governed by pro-arrest and pro-charge policies, also known as 'no-drop' policies. If police are called to a scene and there is evidence that a domestic incident has taken place, they are obligated to arrest the offender and, once arrested, the Crown is required to place a charge. Once the alleged offender is charged, the abused is relegated to the role of witness, only the Crown can drop or stay charges.

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The criminal justice system also includes a variety of victim services initiatives, which include safe housing, batterer treatment programmes and family counselling. These are accessible, however, only through police or court referral. Finally, the criminal justice system, most notably the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada's federal police force, is part of an ad-hoc initiative entitled the New Identities Program, which is analogous to the Witness Protection Program, providing assistance to severely abused women for identity change and relocation.

In addition to the criminal justice system, a number of social services, funding for which is mostly provided by provincial governments, exist to enable individuals to deal with abuse. Transition homes and second-stage housing, women's or community centres, provide short-term refuge (transition homes provide up to 1 month and second-stage housing provides shelter up to 1 year) and information to women experiencing abuse. Some also provide services such as counselling, advocacy, and referrals for additional services, such as lawyers, housing, etc. In addition, crisis hotlines provide information and guidance to women seeking help.

Exploring this framework from the analytical lens of problem representation reveals the ways in which both violence and resistance have been problematized by public policy. A problem representation approach, inspired by the literature on the construction of social problems, requires researchers to consider the ways in which the 'problem' is represented by policy discourse and language, what is problematized and what is not, what are the underlying assumptions and presuppositions of the problematization, and who is constructed as a policy constituent and who, by implication, is defined away from the 'problem' (Bacchi, [1999] 2005). In addition, it requires researchers to consider the effects of such problematizations, including the ways in which they restrict or close the policy space, illuminating the inextricable link between problem representations and their solutions, and their 'lived' or 'material effects' on both policy constituents and those who have been defined away from the policy framework (McCall, 2005; Neysmith et al., 2005).

When we look at the policy framework from this perspective, we see that the policy framework is focused on 'protection'. No-drop policies, transition homes and shelters, all attempt to 'protect' women from abuse. Protection from harm requires removal from danger; it requires exit. In this context, what is problematized is not the behaviour of men, but rather the behaviour of women. In problematizing the behaviour of

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women, the policy framework has constructed resistance only as exit, falsely dichotomizing the women who leave as resisters and the women who stay as either willing participants or helpless victims (for a similar discussion, see Mahoney, 1991, 1992, 1994). The effect is that only a few women benefit from public policy: a number of women have been defined away from the policy framework. For example, by neglecting the context in which choice is made, the policy framework defines away those women who cannot leave, women who lack the social and economic resources with which to sustain an independent household. Similarly, the policy framework defines away those women who do not want to leave, but rather just want the violence to end. By not problematizing gender inequality and the structural causes of violence, the Canadian anti-woman abuse policy framework limits the choices of many women. The question concerning this paper is who gets left out and to what effect.

As a question of public policy, we want to know what are the effects of a particular problem representation. By assuming that all women can and want to leave, the policy framework has limited the scope of options available to women. What does this mean for the choices women make in resisting abuse? Does this limit the degree to which public services are utilized? It is argued here that the construction of resistance as exit will have significant implications for the choices women make in resisting abuse. Resistance is defined as any activity with which women attempt to reduce or eliminate violence, and can be conceptualized along a continuum. From this continuum, exit, including police intervention, separation and homicide, is simply one strategy type among a variety of options, including compliance, deception, informal outreach, and/or formal outreach and intervention, and exposure reduction. All of these strategies, both exit and non-exit options, are ultimately shaped by intersections in the political economy, where women draw on private and/or public resources to mobilize particular strategies. By implication, resources provided by either the state and/or private sources, through private markets, social networks, etc., are the key levers enabling resistance.

This means that resistance is made possible by a complex interplay of both private and public resources. Resources are any material or social assets made possible by states, markets, and social networks. Private resources include personal resources such as access to employment and income, as well as social resources including access to the economic and emotional resources provided by social networks. Previous studies

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demonstrate the importance of social networks in aiding abused women's help-seeking strategies (Rose et al., 2000; Budde and Schene, 2004; Goodman et al., 2005). At the same time, however, the absence of these networks, or networks that fail to provide the support necessary, can work to the detriment of women (Hoff, 1990; Sev'er, 2002).

In addition to private resources are those services and transfers offered through the state. These can include initiatives such as shelters, treatment programmes, police services, and various forms of social assistance, including welfare, public housing, legal aid, etc. Although a number of studies have demonstrated the usefulness of social services in helping women deal with abusive relationships (Farmer and Tiefenthaler, 1996; Bennett et al., 2004), such services are not without their limits. For example, researchers have pointed to race, class, language, ability and sexuality as access barriers (see Donnelly et al., 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Brownridge, 2003; Vickers, 2002; Bannerji, 2002; La Rocque, 2002; Barnett, 2001; Rose et al., 2000). This points to important implications of (and intersections between) race and culture, class, and (dis)ability in enabling women to resist. While sexuality and trans identities are also important here, and certainly can be accommodated by the theoretical framework, unfortunately, the data on which the present analysis is based are limited in this regard and thus are excluded from the discussion. Regardless, these factors will be important determinants of resistance since they in part determine access to both public and private resources (Donnelly et al., 2005; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Yoshioka and Choi, 2005). For example, language barriers and/or discriminatory practices limiting access to the labour market, social networks and public services will constrain resistance options among certain groups. Similarly, individuals with low income will have fewer private resources with which to access resistance strategies, and thus might be crowded into less desirable public strategies. Key here will be the relative or combined importance of both types of resource pools in fostering resistance. Should the analysis point to a heightened role for private resources, then obviously policy directed at fostering these resources will be more effective in combating violence. In contrast, heavy use of public services will suggest that policy directed at strengthening these already existing services will be most effective in combating violence. To address this, let's consider a matrix which analytically distinguishes between the two ideal-types of resource allocation and their effects on rates of resistance and violence (Table 1).

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Table 1 Resource type and resistance

Public resources	*Private resources*	
	High	*Low*
High	High resistance; low levels of violence	Resistance and violence depend on influence of private sphere
Low	Resistance and violence depend on influence of public sphere	Low resistance; high levels of violence

In an ideal case, resource provision can be conceptualized as either high or low in either sphere. Where public resources are high, a broad definition of resistance would be expected, where a wider range of strategies (beyond exit) is supported by the state. Thus, a variety of services would be provided that are both flexible and plentiful enough to accommodate a large number of women. It is important to note that this discussion assumes that these services are effective. However, no assumptions are made about what these services entail, only that they are effective in enabling resistance and thus in combating violence. Ideally, then, when public resources are high, both the quality and quantity of services is such that a range of strategies is available to all in need. Where public services are low, few or very rigid social services would be provided, with resistance narrowly defined. In contrast, where private resources are high, dense social networks would be present, as well as adequate means of subsistence where the emotional and economic needs of the woman are met. Where private resources are low, social and/or economic resources are lacking, making subsistence difficult.

From the grid, there are two pure cases, where both types of resources are either high or low. In the case where both public and private resources are high, it can be hypothesized that resistance would be high and therefore that rates of violence would be low. This is simply because women would be able to more effectively engage in resistance, through either actual resistance or threats thereof, and constrain violence. In the case where both are low, it can be hypothesized that resistance would be low and therefore rates of violence would be high.

The two impure cases are more complex, where the outcomes are dependent on the degree to which the high resources in the one sector can counterbalance the low resources in the other. Important here is whether or not the high resource sector can relieve pressure from

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the low resource sector. To consider this, it is necessary to hypothesize about the role of each sector in fostering or hindering help-seeking behaviour among abused women. While there is considerable evidence to suggest that public services are helpful to abused women, it is important to note the importance of social networks in facilitating the use of those services (Hoff, 1990; Rose et al., 2000; Budde and Schene, 2004; Goodman et al., 2005). For example, in the case where private resources are low and where public resources are high, the lack of private resources, both emotional and economic support, will exert pressure on women to the degree that it would limit their options for resistance. For example, Hoff (1990) observed that women's responses to abuse were in part mediated by the values, norms, and attitudes exhibited by social networks. Similarly, Sev'er (2002) pointed to the potential of destructive social networks to mitigate women's resistance. In addition, studies by Yoshioka and Choi (2005) and Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) demonstrate the importance of culture in shaping women's perceptions of and responses to woman abuse. This suggests that the context in which women choose their strategies is key in shaping the actual options available to women. For example, women lacking the required emotional and social support will be less likely to engage in overt resistance than women who have these support systems.

What this suggests is that regardless of how expansive public provisions are, the private sphere can exert a considerable amount of influence on women's decisions. Put crudely, for some women it is less costly to put up with violence than it is to risk alienating social networks. In contrast, when public resources are low and private resources are high, the private sphere can relieve the pressure exerted from the state. Networks can fill the gaps created by state legislation and programmes, albeit at a cost. From the preceding discussion, however, the converse is not necessarily true. Although the state can do a great deal in terms of alleviating the pressure created from a lack of private resources, it can neither replicate nor replace the functionings of social networks. Referring back to the grid, it can be hypothesized that higher rates of resistance would be expected, and thus lower levels of violence, among women with high private and low public resources than among women with low private and high public resources.

Where does Canada's anti-violence policy framework fit into this analysis and what does it suggest for women's resistance? It is suggested that Canada is characterized by low public services, in that resistance is narrowly defined, offering few options to abused

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women other than exit. The bulk of spending between the federal and provincial governments is targeted at the criminal justice system and transition homes and shelters, both of which require departure from the household (Burt and Mitchell, 1998; Greaves et al., 1995). Furthermore, victim services initiatives, such as treatment programmes, batterer intervention programmes, etc., are mostly available through the criminal justice system, which means that access is granted only after the police have been contacted. This suggests that since private resources are variable, women in Canada face one of two situations: the pure case of low public resources/low private resources or the impure case of low public resources/high private resources, suggesting that class, race, and ability will be crucial determinants of a woman's ability to resist.

From this analysis follow three hypotheses about women's resistance. First, it is expected that because Canada's anti-violence policy framework narrowly defines resistance as exit and because services have been developed to foster this, usage rates of public services will be low in general. Women who cannot or do not want to leave their partners will be unlikely to use the public services available to them. The second and third hypotheses concern women using public services, where it is expected that two patterns will emerge. On the one hand, women with higher private resources will be in a better position to use more extreme strategies, such as police intervention. At the same time, however, police intervention is costly to the abused, because it reduces her access to post-marital spousal resources (either time or money). Thus, women with high household resources would not be expected to use the police. It is therefore expected that women using the police will have higher personal resources but lower household resources than women using other strategies.

On the other hand, women with few personal and household resources, low income and/or less dense social networks, will be crowded into public services. However, since exit is costly, it is expected that these women will use less extreme strategies, such as transition homes and shelters, which enable them to cope with violence with short-term departures from the household. This strategy potentially reduces violence in two ways: first, by reducing exposure and second by offering women a means with which to credibly threaten exit (Farmer and Tiefenthaler, 1996).

To test these hypotheses, a number of questions are explored. First, are women using the public services provided to them? If so, who is

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using these services and to what degree are they varied by race, class, ability, etc.? If not, why? Second, what are the implications for policy reform? Using the General Social Survey on Victimization 1999 (GSS), this paper will attempt to shed light on women's experiences in resisting violence and outline an agenda for policy reform.

Women's resistance

The GSS is a Canadian survey conducted annually to provide policy-makers and researchers insight into various social problems. Every five years, experiences with and perceptions of crime are explored, which includes domestic violence. The survey asks about not only the violence endured, but also responses to it, thus offering insight into women's overt resistance. Specifically, the survey inquires about informal outreach, including talking to family, friends, co-workers, and clergy, as well as formal outreach, including counsellors, lawyers, and health care professionals. In addition, the survey probes the use of social services, such as transition homes and shelters, women's shelters and community centres, and police. Thus, the hypotheses can be tested along three dimensions of strategy choice: private strategies, which include talking with friends and family, co-workers, lawyers, clergy and/or counsellors; public strategies, including transition homes, women's centres, community centres, crisis centres and hotlines, and/or health care professionals; and police intervention. Note that police intervention has been distinguished from other public strategies, as implied above, owing to the difference of degree of exit. More clearly, although transition homes and shelters are designed to foster exit, they enable women to return to their homes at any time, unlike police intervention, where police are to remove the batterer for a period determined by the Crown. Thus, police intervention requires immediate separation, the conditions and terms of which are not controlled by the woman. It should also be noted that since the focus here is on women's resistance, use of police includes only those women who contacted the police themselves, excluding those cases where a third party called the police. The focus is on currently married or cohabitating women reporting at least one incident of emotional or physical abuse in the last five years with their current partner. Descriptive statistics for the sample are provided in Table 2.

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Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Characteristics (population averages)	*Sample (N=7194)*	*Non-abused women (N=6032)*	*Abused women (N=793)*
Age (years)	45.57	45.7	42
Age of youngest child (years)	10	10	9
Average number of children under 16	.64	.79	.63
Relationship length (years)	21	21	18
Personal income	$25 410	$25 877	$22 304
Household income	$40 000–49 000	$40 000–49 000	$40 000–49 000
Proportion of household income	37.5%	40%	37%
Personal education	Some university	High school	Some university
Spouse education	High school	High school	High school
Urban	76%	75%	76%
Aboriginal	2%	1.6%	4.6%
Person of colour	8.6%	7.7%	11.5%
Disability	15.6%	14.8%	22.4%
Household language other than French or English	12%	11%	14%

Source: Statistics Canada (1999) *General Social Survey on Victimization, Cycle 13*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

The first hypothesis regards public service usage, suggesting that because of the narrow construction of resistance as exit, which neglects a number of women, overall public service usage, including police intervention, will be low. Women's reported responses suggest that this is indeed the case. Women are much more likely to draw on private rather than public resources to resist violence. Twenty-three per cent of all abused women report the use of private strategies, including talking to friends, family, or co-workers, as well as consulting lawyers, clergy, or counsellors, compared to 11% of women using public services, including transition homes, women's centres, community centres, crisis hotlines, or consulting health care professionals, and just under 7% of women contacting the police. Of the strategies used, the use of private networks, including friends (about 17%) and family

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(16%), is the most common, followed by the use of a counsellor (9%). Least common private strategies include talking with co-workers (4%) or clergy (3%), and consulting lawyers (3%). In terms of public services, seeking help from health care professionals (8%) and calling the police are the most commonly used services, compared to the much less commonly used services of crisis hotlines (4%), community centres (4%), transition homes (2.5%) and women's centres (2.5%). These findings are not particularly surprising considering the overwhelming presence of both health care professionals and the police in most areas of the country. At the same time, however, use of the police should not be overstated, since only fewer than 7% of all abused women report using this strategy.

These figures, consistent with previous studies (MacLeod, 1987; Sev'er, 2002; Makin, 2003; Ursel, 1998; Ford, 1991; Elliott, 1989), do not mean that the majority of women are not resisting, but rather that the strategy used is not surveyed by the GSS questionnaire (see Agarwal, 1997 for a discussion of the implications of both covert and overt resistance).

The finding that women are using private resources to support their resistance options is consistent with the analytical framework. While shelters and women's centres offer a variety of services, including information dissemination, advocacy, with some even offering second-stage housing, the main goal of shelters is to house abused women for short periods. Similarly, both federal and provincial police forces, as well as many municipal police forces, have adopted pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies. Since resistance is narrowly defined, policy initiatives privileging departure from the household exclude a number of abused women. As a result, these women might be substituting privately funded strategies for those strategies funded by public resources.

To test the second and third hypotheses, independent samples tests were conducted to explore the differences between women using police, public services, and private strategies. Table 3a depicts the results and Table 3b provides a breakdown of strategy usage by educational background.

All reported measures are population averages. Personal income is measured as the respondent's best estimate about her annual before-tax income, including all sources of income. Household income is categorical, including both personal and spousal income estimates. Since this variable is categorical, only ranges of income are reported. Household

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Table 3a Characteristics of women using resistance strategies

	Characteristic (mean)										
Strategy	*Age (years)*	*Income (personal) ($)*	*Household income ($)*	*Disa-bility*	*Person of colour*	*Aboriginal*	*Household language*	*Age of youngest child (years)*	*Relationship length (years)*	*Urban*	*Severity (/110)*
Police	**38**	**23 200**	**30 000–39 999**	28%	17%	11%	19%	6	11	77%	31
Private	**38**	**21 565**	**40 000–49 999**	24%**	10%	7%	12%	8	13	81%	22*
Family	38	21 239	40 000–49 999	27%**	12%	8%	14%	7	13	82%	24**
Friends	37	21 071	40 000–49 999	26%**	8%	8%	10%	7	12	80%	26***
Co-worker	36	20 180	40 000–49 999	29%	0**	10%	8%	7	11	78%	32**
Lawyer	36	17 596	40 000–49 999	22%	3%	10%	4%	6	9	73%	37**
Clergy	40	22 983	40 000–49 999	32%	8%	5%	15%	12**	16	71%	37***
Counsellor	39	22 308	40 000–49 999	35%***	6%	7%	8%	8	13	79%	34***

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Public	42***	19737	30000–39999**	37%***	13%	7%	15%	9*	16***	82%	33***
Transition home	41	18217	30000–39999	43%**	19%	14%	32%****	10	15	73%	43***
Women's centre	35	14394*	20000–29999**	41%**	9%	14%	14*	7	12	78%	37**
Community centre	43**	17047	30000–39999**	21%	7%	11%	13%	10	17**	83%	43***
Crisis centre/hotline	41*	20720	30000–39999	45%***	13%	10%	23%	9	14	77%	31**
Health care professional	41**	19602	30000–39999	43%***	11%	5%	13%	9	16**	80%	30***
All abused women	**42*****	**22304*****	**40000–49999*****	**22%*****	**11%*****	**5%*****	**14%*****	**10**	**18*****	**76%**	**6*****
(non-abused women)	**(46)**	**(25877)**	**(40000–49999)**	**(15%)**	**(8%)**	**(8%)**	**(2%)**	**(11%)**	**(11)**	**(21)**	**(75%)**

***, Significant at $p = .005$.

**, Significant at $p = .050$.

*, Significant at $p = .10$ when equal variances assumed.

Source: Statistics Canada (1999) *General Social Survey on Victimization, Cycle 13*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

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Table 3b Education profile of women using particular resistance strategies

	Some secondary/ elementary/ no school	*High school*	*Some post secondary*	*Diploma/ certificate*	*University degree*
Police	18%	16%	16%	29%	22%
Private	18%	14%	17%	33%	17%
Family	19%	14%	19%	34%	14%
Friends	17%	15%	19%	31%	18%
Co-worker	3%	27%	15%	30%	24%
Lawyer	4%	21%	17%	38%	21%
Clergy	13%	4%	17%	48%	17%
Counsellor	11%	12%	21%	31%	25%
Public	24%	14%	20%	24%	17%
Transition home	6%	6%	28%	44%	17%
Women's centre	21%	5%	21%	26%	26%
Community centre	34%	16%	25%	13%	13%
Crisis centre/hotline	21%	12%	15%	30%	21%
Health care professional	20%	16%	15%	30%	21%
All abused women	25%	16%	14%	28%	17%

language represents a language other than French or English. Severity of abuse is an index variable constructed by multiplying a variable measuring the number of incidents by a variable measuring the severity of abuse (ranging from emotional abuse to forced sexual activity). The range for this variable is 0 to 110. Disability includes any long-term disability ranging from hearing or visibility loss, to limited mobility. Also note that these strategies are not mutually exclusive; individual women could be using several of these options to address violence.

Turning back to the hypotheses, it was posited that women using the police would have much higher private but lower household resources than other women, including both economic and social resources. As seen in Tables 3a and 3b, many of the figures support this hypothesis; however, these findings are not statistically significant and thus should be interpreted cautiously. Thus, while this particular population of women demonstrate differences between those using the police and those who did not, we cannot say with certainty that we would witness similar results in different populations. Women who call the

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police report higher than average personal incomes and tend to have higher than average levels of education. Because police intervention is potentially costly, women contacting the police, expecting separation, would need higher levels of personal resources.

At the same time, however, because calling the police is costly for women, since it removes their partner from the household, some women will have more to lose than others. Women with high earning spouses or those who have been in their relationship for a long time might be less likely to call the police because the costs of doing so would be greater than for other women. Thus, despite having high personal resources, it was argued that women calling the police would also have lower household resources. In other words, the loss incurred by removing the male would be minimal. There is also evidence to support this. Women contacting the police report lower than average household incomes. In addition, women calling the police have been in their relationship for less time than other women although, as noted above, the differences are not statistically significant. As relationships progress, joint resources increase, which means there is more to lose should the relationship end. Thus, women with fewer household resources and those in shorter relationships simply have less to lose than women who have high earning spouses and have been in their relationships for longer periods.

In addition to these characteristics, it should also be noted that women using the police are much more likely to be of colour or Aboriginal status, speak a household language other than French or English, and have a disability. In addition, these women are slightly less likely to reside in an urban area than women using other strategies. This is not surprising given that the police are almost uniformly present throughout Canadian communities, compared to other strategy options. For these women, police intervention might be their only option.

These findings offer support for the next hypothesis, which predicted that women with few private resources, provided by markets and/or communities, would be crowded into public services. Again, many of these figures are not statistically significant; the degree to which we can generalize across the entire population is limited. It is expected that most of these women would use less extreme services, such as transition homes and shelters, compared to police intervention. Again, there is some evidence to suggest that this is the case. Women using all public strategies, including the police, are much more likely to be of colour or Aboriginal status, speak a household language other

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than French or English, although none of these findings are statistically significant, and have a disability, which is statistically significant at the 0.05% level. This suggests that private networks are either less dense or less supportive for these women, crowding them into public services. This would be especially true for recent immigrants, for whom social networks might be absent. In addition, recent studies have demonstrated the impact of culture on women's perceptions of and responses to woman abuse (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Yoshioka and Choi, 2005). Fear of social exclusion and isolation from religious leaders, friends and family might prevent these women from seeking help from these sources.

Additional support for this hypothesis is found when comparing the women using public strategies to those using the police. In addition to the urban/rural divide, discussed above, women using public strategies other than the police have lower levels of income and slightly lower levels of education compared to both the population average and women using the police. Indeed, women using transition homes, and women's and community centres report the lowest personal and household incomes. In addition, compared to women calling the police, the length of their relationships is longer, suggesting that the costs of exit are much higher for these women. This suggests that women who do not want to or cannot exit are using less extreme public services, such as transition homes, shelters, and the health care system. As a result, these women might be seeking to negotiate abuse either by misrepresenting their fallback positions in order to signal their intention to leave or by reducing exposure.

Finally, women with disabilities are much more likely to use public services other than the police. For these women, interactions with the social service system, due to their disability, might reduce their 'transaction costs' in dealing with abuse. Access to a social or case worker provides an additional point of entry to the anti-woman abuse policy framework through either information dissemination or service delivery. The costs of using public services then would be lower than using private services.

There is considerable evidence to provide at least tentative support for the hypotheses. Because resistance is narrowly constructed in public policy, a number of women are left to rely on private resources to mobilize their resistance strategies. Since private resources vary across women, shaped by class, race and ability, differences in strategy choice were expected. In particular, it was posited that in general, public service

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usage would be low, since such services alienate a number of women. It was also argued that women with higher private resources would be more likely to contact the police, since police intervention is costly. In addition, it was argued that women with few private resources will be crowded into public services, but because of the costs associated with police intervention, will be more likely to use less extreme strategies that impose only short-term exits from the household.

These findings are interesting from a policy perspective, but reveal only part of the story. As demonstrated above, only 11% of women reporting abuse use public services and just under 7% use the police. There are a very large number of women who are alienated from the policy framework. Equally important, then, is to consider why women are not using the public services available to them. To this we now turn.

Explaining low service usage rates

The GSS includes a set of probing questions to help determine why women did not use public services, including both social services and the police. Most women reported not using social services or the police because they felt that they did not need or want help (more than 50%) and that they felt they could deal with it in another way (70%). In addition, many women reported that the incident was too minor to seek help from social services (25%) and that the incident was a personal matter (69%) and therefore they were reluctant to contact the police. Indeed, independent samples tests reveal that the women reporting that the incidents were too minor to warrant the use of social services and the police also reported considerably less severe violence than other women (7 vs 11 and 11 vs 17). However, it should be noted that these mean averages are higher than the average severity for all abused women, which recall from Table 3a is 6. It is also interesting to note that women who did not contact the police due to fear of their spouse reported very severe violence, with a mean level of 40.

In addition, the implications of exit are quite significant, with many women reporting that they did not want the relationship to end or their partner to be arrested (35%). Similarly, shame or stigma associated with both public services (2%) and police intervention (35%) can potentially deter women from using them. It should be noted also that there could possibly be an interaction between these responses

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and the construction of resistance as exit (Bex Lempert, 1997; Fugate et al., 2005). Where resistance is constructed only as exit, it is possible that many women experience violence that in their perception does not warrant departure. Emotional abuse or less severe forms of physical abuse might not be seen as enough cause to end the relationship, thus prompting women to resort to other forms of resistance, such as escape to hotels, or costly formal strategies, such as treatment and counselling programmes. Unfortunately, however, these types of data are not available through the GSS.

Before turning to policy reform, one of the central assumptions about public services underlying the preceding analysis should be briefly addressed. Recall that it was assumed that public services worked as they should; that there were no systemic or structural problems in their operations. When this assumption is relaxed it becomes clear that the provision of public services is even more problematic than simply a rigid definition of resistance. And this is certainly a fear in the Canadian context, as well as in other states relying heavily on policies designed to encourage exit (see UNDFW, 2003 for a discussion of cross-national responses to abuse, and Mahoney, 1991, 1992, 1994; Bacchi, [1999] 2005; Lakeman, 2000; Martin and Mosher, 1995; Sheehy, 2002; and Walker, [1990] 2003 for an overview of some of the key issues with the criminal justice system). In Canada, for example, reductions in social spending in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario since the mid-1990s have meant that the number of shelters available and the operating capacity of those remaining have been drastically reduced (Burt and Mitchell, 1998; Morrow et al., 2004). In addition, racism, language barriers, and ablism have emerged as key issues in the delivery of social services and criminal justice responses (Rankin et al., 2001; Vickers, 2002; Sev'er, 2002; and Donnelly et al., 2005 for examples. See also Statistics Canada, 2004, for an overview of transition homes in Canada). Acknowledging these limits, as well as reconceptualizing resistance will be central to policy reform, to which we now turn.

Concluding remarks: Policy reform

Constructing anti-woman abuse policy from the perspective of women's resistance will have a twofold effect. On the one hand, it shifts focus away from women as victims, acknowledging that the power of women

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is often constrained not by will but by conditions established within the political economy. As a result, it offers women a larger variety of options when attempting to resist violence. On the other hand, enabling women to resist violence has the potentially radical effect of undercutting the rationale for violence as it is situated in the political economy. From this perspective, reformulating the goal of policy away from protection/exit towards prevention/ending violence not only serves to bring into scope of analysis the behaviour of men, but it also implicates structural change and an expansion of social services that will support women regardless of whether or not they want to end the relationship.

The preceding analysis demonstrates that resistance patterns are varied, and are shaped by class, race and culture, ability and geography, at least in this sample of women. It was also argued that the low usage rates of public services stem from the rigid definition of resistance as only departure from the household, as well as additional access issues which will cause women to resort to private resources. This creates a problem for women with few private resources, however, since it is these women who lack adequate levels of both private and public resources with which to effectively resist violence. Indeed, from Table 3a, women using public services experience much higher severity of violence than other women. This finding is no doubt due to both cause and effect, i.e., the severity of abuse prompts them to seek help from public services and/or the use of such services is limited in the degree to which they can constrain violence. Thus women crowded into public services are not only most vulnerable to abuse, but also have the fewest resources with which to constrain it, suggesting that the violence they experience will be more severe than for other women. From the grid, the ideal case of high private and high public resources will be the best system with which to combat violence.

Ensuring that abused women have access to both private and public resources implicates a complex agenda for policy reform, essentially moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach towards a more flexible, adaptive system capable of addressing women's needs. At the micro-level, women must draw on resources provided by markets, families and social networks, as well as third sector agencies. In turn, these entities are governed at the macro-level by municipal, provincial, and federal governments. In effect, policy reform cannot be directed at one entity in isolation, but rather must consider the complexity of the political economy. This requires particular attention to gender equality

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policy, which implicates not only women, but also men. It is becoming increasingly important to also consider the necessary contributions of men and boys in achieving gender equality (Connell, 2003, 2005).

Offering women private resources, including income, education, and childcare must be given a central role in anti-violence policy. Part of providing these resources requires strengthening social networks, which will not only expand women's access to resources, but also combat social exclusion. Mentioned above, increasing attention has been paid to the role of informal support systems in aiding abused women. Ideally, these networks will be not only flexible, responding to the immediate needs of the women, they will also be a continuous presence in the woman's life (Budde and Schene, 2004; Goodman and Epstein, 2005). This has important implications for women from marginalized groups, since they offer the opportunities to combat access problems due to language, race and culture. Thus, social inclusion programmes are crucial to combating violence, as are locally based, flexible programmes for abused women, which can include community outreach and awareness campaigns, treatment programmes, and justice forums, which must be distinct from the criminal justice system (Sabol et al., 2004). At the same time, however, it is crucial to balance cultural sensitivity with the needs of the woman.

In addition to private resources, publicly provided services are in dire need of reform. Perhaps most significantly, the conceptualization of resistance needs to be expanded beyond exit to include those women who do not want to leave their partners. This is an important yet understudied element of violent relationships (for exceptions, see Bowker, 1983; Horton and Johnson, 1993). Forcing women to leave will not only exclude these women but also possibly work to their detriment. Policy must offer a much broader scope of services to families. For example, many of the existing treatment programmes for batterers are privately funded and require court or police referral (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2004). This means that families are not only out of pocket, but must also seek police intervention to access these services, risking long-term separation and, as a result, increased financial strain. Redesigning these as free-standing public programmes will increase their usage and offer women another tool with which to resist abuse.

At the provincial level, funding for affordable housing and transition homes is crucial (Burt and Mitchell, 1998; Morrow et al., 2004). Affordable housing will help establish a basis for a credible exit threat, regardless of whether or not the woman wants to leave

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(Panda and Agarwal, 2005). In addition, transition homes perform a dual function. First, they provide assistance to women 'in transition', helping them to make alternative arrangements. Second, they provide temporary refuge from violent episodes, allowing women to negotiate lower levels of violence (Farmer and Tiefenthaler, 1996). It is therefore crucial not only that communities get more of them, but also that the current operating capacity is expanded to accommodate various disabilities, children, pets (Faver and Strand, 2003), as well as lengthening the duration of stays and offering services in a variety of languages where numbers warrant.

Finally, the criminal justice system is in dire need of reform. Not only do no-drop policies need to be abandoned, but the expansion of the criminal justice system in woman abuse policy must also come to an end. Rather than expand criminal justice services to include such initiatives as victim compensation programmes and domestic violence courts, as has been the trend in Canada, policy-makers must begin to think about creating a flexible, responsive justice system that is accessible to all families. In addition, it must be just one small part of the anti-violence strategy rather than its main pillar.

Above all, the preceding analysis has demonstrated that there is no uniform pattern of resistance among abused women. This suggests that the attempt by policy-makers to create a 'one size fits all' system is potentially dangerous since it can alienate a large number of women (Goodman and Epstein, 2005). Instead, policy-makers must work to establish a system that is accessible by all.

The requirements of this system will vary by time and space and can be determined only by undertaking more research. Despite an expansive literature devoted to woman abuse, women's resistance to violence is a relatively new field of study. In this regard, future research is necessary to understand the complexities of women's resistance, its constraining potential on violence, and its policy implications. Similarly, the theoretical framework outlined above should be applied to more cases in order to seek cross-national comparisons across policy responses, exploring how resistance is constructed by public policy and its impact on outcomes.

The emphasis on resistance is not to place the onus of ending violence on women, perpetuating the tendency to blame the victim. Rather, focusing on women's resistance reveals the degree to which responsibility for both violence and its resistance resides in the state and the structural forces and power relations it maintains.

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❑ Stephanie Paterson is an assistant professor in the department of political science at Concordia University, Canada. She earned a PhD in public policy from the school of public policy and administration at Carleton University, Canada. She specializes in feminist policy studies and has published in the areas of Canadian family policy, midwifery legislation, and conjugal violence against women. She is currently working on projects concerning gender mainstreaming and the emergence of the alternative birth movement in Canada. *Address*: Department of Political Science, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W, Montreal QC H3G 1M8, Canada. *email*: spaterso@alcor.concordia. ❑

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