


Community Intervention in Context: Gender-Based Violence, Inequality and Intervention in the United States and Cuba

Intervención comunitaria en contexto: violencia de género, desigualdad e intervención en los Estados Unidos y Cuba

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ABSTRACT: Gender-based violence is a persistent problem on a global scale. While the United States (US) has relatively well developed responses to gender-based violence, commonly referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence (DV), those responses are subject to question on evidentiary as well as theoretical grounds. The authors examine the historical US response to gender-based violence and the challenges to its construction in the fields of law and social work. The authors raise Cuban practices as a potential antidote to the US approach, and invite further comparative dialogue grounded in authentic appraisal of existing models employed in each context.

KEYWORDS: decolonization, domestic violence, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, patriarchy, Violence Against Women Act.

RESUMEN: La violencia de género es un problema persistente a escala mundial. Si bien Estados Unidos (EE.UU.) Tiene respuestas relativamente bien desarrolladas a la violencia de género, comúnmente conocida como violencia de pareja (IPV) o violencia doméstica (DV), esas respuestas están sujetas a preguntas por razones probatorias y teóricas. Los autores examinan la respuesta histórica de los Estados Unidos a la violencia de género y los desafíos para su construcción en los campos del derecho y el trabajo social. Los autores plantean las prácticas cubanas como un posible antídoto para el enfoque de los Estados Unidos e invitan a un mayor diálogo comparativo basado en una evaluación auténtica de los modelos existentes empleados en cada contexto.

PALABRAS CLAVE: descolonización, violencia doméstica, violencia de género, violencia de pareja, patriarcado, Ley de violencia contra la mujer.

In the United States (US), the disciplines of law and social work have been on the forefront in attempting to meet the challenge of gender-based violence, commonly referred to in US academic disciplines as intimate partner violence (IPV), a term referencing abusive acts committed in the context of intimate relationships. However, the effectiveness of these current interventions may be questioned on both evidentiary and theoretical grounds.

The US historically has addressed IPV in a manner that has diminished its economic and social significance, focusing on interventions within the civil and criminal justice systems (Goodmark, 2004; Houston, 2014). Protective orders and criminal sanctions have been deployed as the primary intervention, with social work and social services a secondary intervention and at times an accessory to the law enforcement approach. Recent increases in IPV-related crimes indicate this issue remains an insidious and structural problem in the US (Morgan & Oudenederk, 2019; Weisberg, 2019b). Statistical data, increased scholarly critique, along with the current state of the world, indicate it is time for US scholars to reach beyond the current US lens and collaborate with researchers and scholars using alternative strategies to address this issue.

The goal of this presentation was to ground future comparative conversations concerning US and Cuban approaches IPV in authenticity – taking realistic account of the successes and challenges experienced in each context – and spark creativity in thinking about efforts for the future. Current critical discourse in law and social work, areas integral to IPV intervention in the US, are examined.

The overarching intent is to develop an authentic and accurate appraisal of the strengths and current critiques of the US approach to IPV as a means to establish a basis for meaningful dialogue that transcends political commitments to entrenched models. Comparative studies and transnational conversations are vital to progress.

Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence

Global Data

Despite perceived improvements in gender-based violence, the murder of intimate partners has increased through the early decades of this century both worldwide. The 2018 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Study on Homicide reports that 58 % of female homicide victims, nearly 6 out of 10, were killed by an intimate partner or family member in 2017 (UNODC, 2018). These numbers represent an increase of 11 % over the previous report on homicide conducted in 2012 (Weisberg, 2019c). That report also indicates that in intimate partner homicides, women are victims in 82 % of cases while men are victims in 18 % of cases (UNODC, 2018). The UN Global Study 2018 data is particularly reliable because, while violence against women tends to be underreported overall, homicide data is more effectively reported than other forms of violence.

The UN, in a 2019 follow-up study, reported that figures for female homicide tend to be persistent, remaining relatively flat in relationship to the total homicide rate. This phenomena means the share of female homicides tends to be higher in countries with a lower overall homicide rate, and as overall homicide declines in a particular location, male-female, intimate partner and family member homicide, tend to account for a larger share of the total (UNODC, 2019).

US data

US agencies make robust efforts to collect IPV-related data. Significant funding for US law enforcement efforts have contributed to the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ), Bureau of Justice Statistics, compiling complete, detailed, and up-to-date data about arrests and charges attributed to IPV throughout the US. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) also maintains excellent data collected through surveys such as the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), an ongoing, nationally representative, random-digit-dial telephone survey of sexual violence, IPV, and stalking among adult women and men in the US (Smith, et.al, 2018).

In 2012, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics released a study that found a 64 % decline in rates of IPV from 1994 to 2010, or from 9.8 victimizations per 1,000 persons to 3.6 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older (Catalan, 2012). The study was widely touted as demonstrating the effectiveness of early US intervention efforts (Weisberg, 2019b; USDOJ, 2015). However, a recent study conducted by criminologists Fridel and Fox (2019) using FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports concluded that data from 2014-2017 actually showed a 19 % increase in intimate partner homicides during that time period.

The USDOJ's Criminal Victimization 2018 Bulletin reports an increase in domestic and intimate partner crimes between 2014 and 2018 from 4.2 % per 1,000 persons age 12 and above to 4.8 %. The number corresponds to an increase in the total number of violent victimizations from 2015-2018, and includes larger numbers of sexual assaults, aggravated assault, and simple assault (Morgan & Oudederk, 2019). The CDC asserts that one in five US women and one in ten men experience IPV in their lifetime. Further, the CDC

estimates that nearly half of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner (CDC, 2019).

The data suggests that the effectiveness of US efforts to eradicate IPV and address its root causes is subject to question. Questions concerning the meaning of the data; recent increases in IPV offenses; and scholarly debates concerning the appropriateness of US justice-based responses call for re-evaluating existing strategies.

Historical Review of US Approach to IPV

Society has long recognized the connection between IPV and patriarchy, noting that IPV is founded in patriarchal customs as tradition dictated that women were to obey their husbands, who were deemed the authority of the home. While overt violence was discouraged, men were encouraged to discipline their wives when necessary. «Men were expected to exercise moderate 'chastisement' from time to time» (Fischer, 1989, p. 295). Violence in marriages was a common occurrence during the 17th century, as husbands, who were deemed the authority of the home (Fischer, 1989). During the 1840's the temperance movement catapulted the next reform campaign against domestic violence (DV). Created to abolish alcohol use, the temperance movement was used to generate legislation for equal rights, economic independence, divorce, and protection against physical abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Pleck, 1987). Although, no specific laws were passed against wife beating, the policies regarding divorce provided necessary attention to the issue of family violence (Plummer, 2007).

In the late 19th century, temperance pioneers began to advocate that flogging laws be passed for wife beaters. In turn Maryland, Delaware, and

Oregon all passed laws allowing whipping posts as punishment for wife beating (Pleck, 1987). At the start of the twentieth century, domestic relations courts were created and used to address family violence issues and child abuse and neglect cases. Instead of being viewed as a crime, domestic violence was viewed as the fault of both the man and the woman, and a misunderstanding in the marriage. The courts did not get involved to punish the abuser as a criminal, but encouraged reconciliation (Pleck, 1987). There was little discussion and legislative change in the area of DV until the 1960s and 70s. In 1979 President Carter established the Office of Domestic Violence and the federal government began to pay for the training and employment of DV shelter workers through the Concentrated Employment and Training Act (CETA) (Felter, 1997). But significant changes did not occur until 1976 when five women filed a class action suit against the Oakland, California police department because the police did not respond to reports of assault. The resulting settlement sparked mandatory policy changes, including the expectation of prompt responses to domestic dispute calls, arrest if there is probable cause, and the enforcement of Orders of Protection (Sparks, 1996).

The next marked change came in the 1990s with the passing of VAWA, on the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This has been termed the criminalization of domestic violence (Danis, 2003). It has been hypothesized that the criminalization of domestic violence was sparked by a combination of social and political incidents between 1980 and 1990 (Ferraro, 1996). The mixture of a conservative political agenda under President Reagan, combined with the dissemination of the results of a 1984 study on the effects of arrest on the recidivism rate of abusive men (funded by the National Institute of Justice

(NIJ)), and high profile court cases that cost police departments a large sum of money created a climate ripe for the framing of DV as a crime (Ferraro, 1996).

Framing the US Response to IPV

The US response to IPV can be described as significant federal funding supporting state criminal enforcement regimes and civil legal remedies. While many US sectors are engaged in independently focused and funded efforts to respond to, treat and prevent IPV, including law, social work, medicine and education, legal policies to respond to IPV are potentially the most visible, significantly funded, and influential of the existing response mechanisms. Legal policies criminalize acts defined as IPV, and civil legal mechanisms are developed in correspondence to criminalized behaviors.

The configuration of IPV as a public crime can not only be traced to our history but to theories espoused by influential feminist scholars and activists that interpreted domestic violence as a patriarchal force requiring state intervention in the form of criminal policies including mandatory arrest and pro-prosecution practices (Houston, 2019). For feminists, espousing criminal intervention, as opposed to public health or other measures, the pervasive problem of patriarchy justified co-opting the power of the state through criminal policies and the attendant loss of autonomy it was suspected women would experience in relationship to inflexible criminal practices. No-drop prosecution policies began in earnest in the 1980s and 1990s, while mandatory arrest laws were in place in 13 states by 1989 (Houston).

Federal funding followed quickly on the heels of the development of no-drop prosecution policies. In 1994, Congress passed the Violence

Against Women Act (VAWA) which funneled funding into state law enforcement in the form of Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors (STOP) grants and other law enforcement measures (Houston, 2019). Through the injection of federal funding, legislators and advocates intended to improve criminal justice response through training for law enforcement; improve investigation and prosecution practices; fund educational efforts; and expand victim services among other objectives (Weisberg, 2019a). VAWA and related funding mechanisms, such as the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), have continued to fund state-based police and service delivery efforts until the present day, subject to expansion and contraction of funding levels related to political volatility. While a comprehensive discussion of the scope of programs funded through the federal scheme is beyond the scope of this project, federal funding exerts overwhelming influence over the approaches adopted by the states (NNEDV, 2019). As described further below, federal funds support criminalization of defendants as part and parcel of an agenda of separation as the appropriate response to IPV (Goldfarb, 2008; Houston). Several criminal policies contribute to making separation possible, and these policies receive significant institutional support. These policies include mandatory or preferred arrest, IPV-specific crimes, enhanced penalties associated with IPV, victim notification laws, and no-drop prosecution policies in some jurisdictions.

Criminal penalties related to IPV

Before proceeding to describe corresponding civil legal remedies, a further word about criminal penalties in the US context. Describing how criminal penalties operate the ground is

challenging due to state-to-state variation within the federal system. Most criminal laws are the product of state laws, and state laws can vary greatly in terms of the particular mechanism, the statutory language employed, and the enforcement regime in which the law is situated. Deriving meaning, or analyzing effectiveness, is complex (Zeoli, 2011). An example of the complexity arising from state-to-state variation can be observed in mandatory arrest, one of the common enforcement tools encouraged through VAWA. While many states have statutes that encourage arrest, less than half of states have truly mandated arrest. Some state arrest laws express a preference for arrest, with law enforcement maintaining significant discretion to determine whether an arrest should be made. Drawing firm conclusions about the effectiveness of US policies such as mandatory arrest is complicated due to state-to-state variation (Zeoli, 2011).

Civil legal remedies for IPV also developed alongside criminal measures. Many believed civil remedies would be ineffective without law enforcement response, resulting in a prioritization of criminal enforcement and funding (Houston, 2019). Criminal and civil justice responses to IPV intentionally operate in concert. Criminal measures expand opportunities to sanction as well as dole out penalties associated with sanctions, while civil justice measures also provide additional means to exert criminal penalties through criminal sanction for violation of civil orders.

Since the passage of VAWA and the implementation of legal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, states have introduced new and enhanced criminal justice response measures. These include enhanced arrest policies, whether mandatory, preferred or discretionary; witness

tampering penalties and charges; stay-away orders as a component of sentencing; increased penalties; firearm seizure; victim notification laws; and limitations on the right to own or purchase future weapons (Weisberg, 2019a).

Legislation at both the state and federal level has expanded to include new or revised offenses as understanding of batterer behavior evolves. At the federal level, offenses of interstate stalking and federal cyber-stalking are available. At the state level, new crimes have appeared, such as the New Jersey Cyber-Harassment Statute at NJSA 2C:33-4.1 (2014), as well as the amendment of existing crimes to reflect new understanding of behaviors. One example of the latter is the amendment of assault statutes to reflect the gravity of strangulation offenses (Weisberg, 2019a).

Civil legal responses

The main form of civil legal relief – civil protective orders or CPOs – operate both independently from, and to further support, criminal justice penalties. Civil protective orders are court orders requiring batterers to cease battering behavior and refrain from contact with the victim at risk of criminal penalty for violation. Civil protective orders are often enforced through mandatory jail sentences for violations. Commentators suggest that civil protective orders are an achievement for survivors, and that they significantly increase the safety for individuals that obtain them (Goldfarb, 2008). A civil protective order may also provide for a presumptive custodial arrangement, monetary support or payment of damages, and other relief typically available through family court litigation. Specifics as to the duration of the order, extent of additional relief available, and procedures to obtain a civil protection order vary state to state (ABA, 2016).

By enjoining contact, most civil protection order statutes require that the protected party separate from the abusive partner (Goldfarb). Perceived as effective, civil protective orders function as a preferred response to IPV (Goodmark, 2004; Holt, et al, 2003). The preference is manifested through government spending supporting advocacy directed at survivors obtaining civil protective orders. Attendant negative consequences, such as separation assault, may be minimized by service providers (Goodmark, 2004).

Overall, popular support for criminal and civil justice responses is resounding, with continued development and refinement of remedies occurring at the state level and significant federal funding for criminal enforcement, civil legal relief and services through VAWA and VOCA each year. Survivors that remain with an abusive partner often find themselves with few systemically supported options. Consequences of this strong preference have inhibited creativity spending on batterer-focused responses such as treatment or economic measures (Goodmark, 2004).

Evaluating the Effectiveness of US Justice-Based Responses to IPV

Evidence-based studies of criminal justice responses improve our understanding of the mixed results these efforts have achieved. Arrest data is frequently studied. Concerning mandatory arrest statutes, Zeoli et al 'study (2011) found that these laws could increase arrests of victims through the possibility of dual arrest, where both parties are arrested without regard to who is the primary aggressor even where one acts in self-defense. Mandatory arrest laws may be criticized for many failings, including the possibility that mandatory arrest may be triggered if the victim acts in self-defense leaving a visible sign of injury.

Further, mandatory arrest statutes do not take account of victim preference which tends to disempower survivors, limit favorable officer discretion, and create opportunities for re-victimization.

Like mandatory arrest statutes, statutes encouraging law enforcement to determine the primary aggressor before making dual arrest have also been studied (Hirschel & McCormack, 2019). Primary aggressor statutes are an attempt to encourage police to identify and arrest a primary aggressor as opposed to making a dual arrest, particularly in cases where there is some indication of mutuality, whether by virtue of action in self-defense or for another reason. Hirschel and McCormack (2019) studied a ten-year period, finding arrests more likely in cases involving physical violence and severe physical violence than other types of victimization and that primary aggressor laws were not statistically significant in decreasing likelihood of dual arrest. The same study yielded troubling conclusions for marginalized populations. Same sex couples being significantly less likely to have an offender arrested and yet also more likely to experience dual arrest than heterosexual couples. Lower arrest rates for Black couples overall raised concerns regarding police bias and the perceived normalization of violence in Black communities. Further, Black women tend to avoid calling police in situations of IPV out of fear of aiding and perpetuating the arrest and imprisonment of Black men.

Beyond evaluative studies predicated on arrest data, other critiques of the criminal justice response are qualitative and anecdotal. Criticisms of mandatory arrest and prosecution note that mandatory policies within the control of the state, as opposed to the individual, do not support autonomy and empowerment of women, and

absorb resources (Brenner, 2013). A frequently offered criticism is the notion that the criminal justice system approach re-traumatizes and fails to empower women, and primarily serves to empower the state. Other studies have focused on whether the state adequately supports individuals seeking to separate from an abusive party. While individuals from all socio-economic groups may be subjected to IPV, financial barriers to independence, particularly for impoverished women, are significant (Hahn & Postmus, 2014). Poverty and IPV can be seen as intertwined, where the dynamics of abuse may affect the ability to work or what type of employment a victim may hold, and abusers may attempt to directly control access to wealth. Homelessness is a serious concern for women experiencing intimate partner violence. Another inadequacy of separation-focused efforts includes inadequate economic supports to foster independence including inadequate access to emergency and transitional housing and non-residential services (Weisberg, 2014).

Legal system response to IPV may be criticized due to the failure to adequately resource legal supports and provide legal representation for most victims. Lawyers are not guaranteed to survivors seeking CPOs in the vast majority of US states (Smalz, 2006). While sources exist to sustain some level of legal assistance through VAWA and VOCA, many victims navigate the legal system without a lawyer. Legal advocates, often with a social work background, may be available. Advocates with social work training, but not a law license, cannot appear at the bar of the court in most states, assist in filling out and filing forms, or provide legal advice due to unauthorized practice of law concerns (Smalz, 2006; Lizdas & Murphy, 2009). Further, the social worker (often given the title victims' advocate) is not in a position to

mediate between victim and court system. On the contrary, their role is to share information on the process and offer comfort and support. This results in an attempt to minimize the emotional and social damage caused by the abusive person and the judges' response.

With respect to batterer intervention and treatment, policy-makers have struggled with identifying what works. There is reasonable agreement that short-intervention, anger management-style treatment is insufficient even though occasionally still ordered or implemented by courts or sought by parties. While there are numerous articles concerning batterer treatment protocols, most do not identify specific treatment modalities, or discuss variables affecting likelihood of successful treatment (Velonis, et al, 2018). Velonis, et al, recommend developing a mechanism for critical self-reflection that creates an opportunity to accept responsibility, change attitudes and behaviors, and develop empathy. More research linking community factors that contribute to treatment success including employment, housing or food insecurity, racism, or other community characteristics, and to create clear and descriptive program theory is required. Recommendations include distinguishing between shame and guilt, and creating space for acceptance, responsibility and empathy (Velonis, et al, 2018). The lack of reliable data about effective treatment models further inhibits comparing the effectiveness of justice-based to treatment-based response mechanisms.

The justice-based response, despite its detractors, has achieved several noteworthy advances. Criminal and civil legal consequences have transformed public opinion and norms concerning the acceptability of IPV. Police and law enforcement no longer fail to respond in the face of severe physical abuse. Offenders in many

instances voluntarily comply with civil protection orders. Criminal and civil legislation provides a forum to address our developing understanding of the dynamics of IPV. Studies validate that victims seeking relief through the justice system report fewer violent incidents after obtaining civil protective orders (Goldfarb, 2008). Reflecting on the success and failings of the US legal system response to IPV is a complex endeavor. US intervention methods can, and should, continue to evolve to offer improved safety, better treatment options, realistic economic support and less traumatizing choices. The opportunity is ripe for comparative work and international dialogue to encourage authentic reflection on challenges and successes met in particular contexts as well as to spark creativity.

Social Work and Implications for IPV Responses

Social work as a profession identifies its mission, in part, upholding diversity, inclusion and social justice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) outlines the role of social work as based in the promotion of social justice. What has become increasingly clear is that at times those in the profession have fallen short of this goal. Recently, the profession and its education model have come under criticism for using the very same oppressive and marginalizing tactics it purports trying to dismantle (Gregory, 2020). There has been a call to «decolonize social work», with the goal of decentering White Euro-centric approaches that have historically dominated the field (Fortier & Hon-Sing Wong, 2018). This recent movement has begun to highlight the current reliance on white supremacy culture characteristic in social work education and practice (Gregory, 2020). With that has come a surge of calls to reevaluate the profession's approach and move

towards one that places Indigenous (and marginalized) people's lives, thoughts, and methods to the center. As we consider this adjustment in how social work is viewed, we must then consider how this will impact our theoretical models of practice, our policies, and methods of research. One such area that is ripe for review is the social work approach to IPV. The social work profession has been complicit in aiding and supporting a criminal justice approach that remains the primary form of intervention when addressing IPV, an intervention that does not reflect social work values and ethics such as promoting self-determination for marginalized persons and confidentiality.

The US has a long history of addressing domestic violence or IPV in a manner that has either ignored or excused it. The leap to a criminal justice approach was born after mandatory arrest and CPOs were seen as the reliable solution to this societal problem. As we see from the current statistics domestic violence remains an insidious and structural issue in the US. It is now time to reach out beyond our current lens on how we intervene when faced with a client experiencing IPV and learn from others how to address this issue. By examining Cuba's approach to IPV, the US can learn and perhaps begin an alternative approach that includes the decolonization process.

Social Work and IPV

As all policies and laws created in the US, our interventions and approaches to IPV are based in a settler mentality that favors white supremacy characteristics and heteropatriarchal framing. In order to examine the current focus of settler colonialism that is weaved throughout our practices in IPV we must also look to new frameworks, those outside of the historical usage

of criminal justice. Understanding that IPV is not a point in time in a relationship, but a result of the structures in society that maintain misogyny and racism can and will promote the inception of new ways of addressing this issue.

Social work's attempts to be culturally «competent» in approach to IPV has been designed as essentially additions to US expectations around what is deemed an appropriate response. This has been a historical approach to social work interventions that maintain the Euro-centric model. Indeed, the false promotion of native tropes that encourage only the use of ceremonies and rituals denies the intellectual and political contributions of Native Americans (Arvin et al., 2013). Further, it fetishes Indigenous People into a flavor of the month, in which their beliefs are commodified and appropriated.

Additionally, colonized view of gender as it related to IPV, violence against women versus against people. Indigenous activists refuse the binary of «women issues» (Arvin et al., 2013). Native feminist theorists disavow the use of the man/woman binary and see those terms as social constructs created by the heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism (Arvin et al., 2013). Further, while at face value it would seem progressive to highlight the social hierarchy in our society and the prevalence of violence against women, it also potentially paved the way for the type of response we have obtained since the 1980s. Women's issues have been historically trivialized and responses have been slow and ineffective and impact funding, including amounts and forms.

Do we as a profession have a responsibility to train people from their own communities and teach them how to serve their own community members? They best understand that community and the crisis that might occur and the needs.

Taking the lead from Cuba's model, it is time to consider social work's consistent encouragement of «parachuting» into communities that are offered assistance by individuals disconnected to the very neighborhoods they serve. Creating a community based approach and helping to transform the community itself, will allow US social workers to decolonize the process of aid, and place the actually assessment, planning and intervention in the hands of the people.

It is also time to review our professions' fear of dual relationships. Having social workers based in their own community will create a sense of community success due to a higher instance of collaboration. Further, problem identification will come not from an outsider but from an emergentes who will know the problems plaguing the community due to their familiarity with the area. This does not need to put clients in jeopardy for exploitation, but in fact may increase and solidify our working relationships. IPV will then be viewed as a societal issue that is addressed based on the needs of that particular community. Training on stereotypes of gender, a reeducation program for individuals who are unemployed, a peer support program to provide guidance and support during points of pain are just some ideas that might be brought forth by a community dealing with IPV. Rather than address the problem as an individual failing that necessitates criminal justice reform, IPV may be addressed as sociological concern meant to be managed by the very people themselves.

Decolonization and Institutional Transformation

The US legal response to IPV has been identified as a way to protect victims and the surrounding community from further violence.

Heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism refer to expressions of patriarchy and paternalism that rely upon very narrow definitions of the male/female binary and the male gender is strong capable wise and composed while the female gender is perceived as weak incompetent naïve and confused. (Arvin, et al., 2013)

This patriarchal approach is built on a nations-state perspective that promotes control, domination and coercion (Smith, 2008). Heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural. «Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nations-state rule their citizens» (Smith, 2008, p. 312).

As outlined in the start of this paper, it is clear that the judicial system has been used historically to manage the intervention to interpersonal violence. Further, a patriarchal approach has not only excused its prevalence but provided support for some if it's violent and even deadly results. As the government became more involved with what had been originally viewed as a «personal matter» the policies and laws tended to replicate the oppressive and paternalistic views so clung to by society. The call to treat IPV as equally as other assault cases was responded to with overly aggressive terms that, rather than empower the victim, took away individuals' rights on how to address their own abuse experiences. Victims in turn were forced to comply with laws that at times placed themselves in further danger of abuse and death. Those victims who refused to abide by these new policies and laws were themselves punished by the state through mandatory counseling, removal of children, homelessness, and even arrest. The current approach that focuses on a legal remedy to reduce and alieve IPV has culminated in oppressive actions by the legal and police system that further controls victims and their rights.

The Search for Alternative Paradigms: Can Cuban Modes of Intervention Offer Alternatives

Cuba's model of social work approaches the work of alleviating social issues, such as IPV, from a community based approach. Termed «agents of community transformation», Cuban social workers view the community as the organism/client and the mechanism for change (De Urrutia & Strug, 2013, p. 107). In response to economic need, neighborhoods became the locus for intervention in an effort to bridge the gap left by the government. Supported by Castro, community members were mobilized as emerging social issues surfaced (De Urrutia & Strug, 2013).

This neighborhood movement was built on a multidisciplinary approach used to address «community development and social planning» and local councils were formed to connect the community with government municipalities (De Urrutia & Strug, 2013, p. 111). Social work education was based on teaching students how to create transformation versus amelioration and assistance. Once trained social workers were sent to communities to work with people who live there in order to find solutions to impending concerns (De Urrutia & Strug, 2013). The social workers, termed *emergentes*, required these recent graduates to live in the very community they intended to assist. This creates a role of «insider» and allows for community centered approaches that are unique to that neighborhood.

Decolonization of the approach to IPV

The decolonization of social work and in particular its approach to IPV must include a historical examination of the colonization's impact on a people and their land. A self-reflection of Eurocentric and white supremacy culture and characteristics is essential to begin the

destabilization and decentering of colonial structures. «A decolonization movement must thirst for the eradication of both heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism» (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 17). We have had a circular response in history in which White supremacy culture instilled heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism that gendered behaviors and made social hierarchy the mainstay of our society. IPV is a result of this colonialism which normalized violence against women and the use of the state to manage and control its people. Further, it demanded the use of binary terms with the intention of creating secondary citizens. Decolonization is a long term approach that requires complete upheaval of our current systems and that process will take a concerted effort by those in power to see how the current system disavows people and their experience of colonization and the erasure of their culture.

Recent events in the US has called for the abolishment of the police. This call raises many questions around how we as a society would address actions we deem «unlawful». Part of this call to action includes the institution of more social workers recently published by the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW NYS Chapter Facebook post, 2020). The alternative view explains the harm and control that social workers commit when aligning with the values and ethics not espoused by the field (Vakharia, 2020). The expected follow up question asks how defunding the police and decolonizing social work's involvement with police might impact such social issues and IPV and sexual assault. IPV would be decriminalized and the approach would lean on community input and interpretations on how abuse would be addressed.

Conclusion

United Nations call to take legislative action against gender-based violence resonate within most borders (UN Women, 2019), however, calls to action are inadequate without taking account of political and systemic realities on the ground. International and comparative work provides an opportunity to reflect critically upon how legal and service delivery systems operate in a particular context. International and comparative dialogue may encourage creativity that dialogue within a political body may discourage.

The authors hope that comparative dialogue predicated on authentic, self-critical appraisals of the challenges and contributions of two disciplines on the forefront of responding to gender-based violence in the US will create productive exchange that will spark creativity and new directions in intervention. Further dialogue reflecting on the successes and challenges in the Cuban context, as well as prevention, law reform, and decolonization efforts in the US would be a welcome contribution to existing discourse.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Author's Contribution

Victoria Chase: contributed the description of the legal framework and research concerning femicide. Both authors contributed to manuscript review.

Sara Plummer: contributed a review of the history of social work's response to intimate partner violence, including the call for decolonization of approaches.