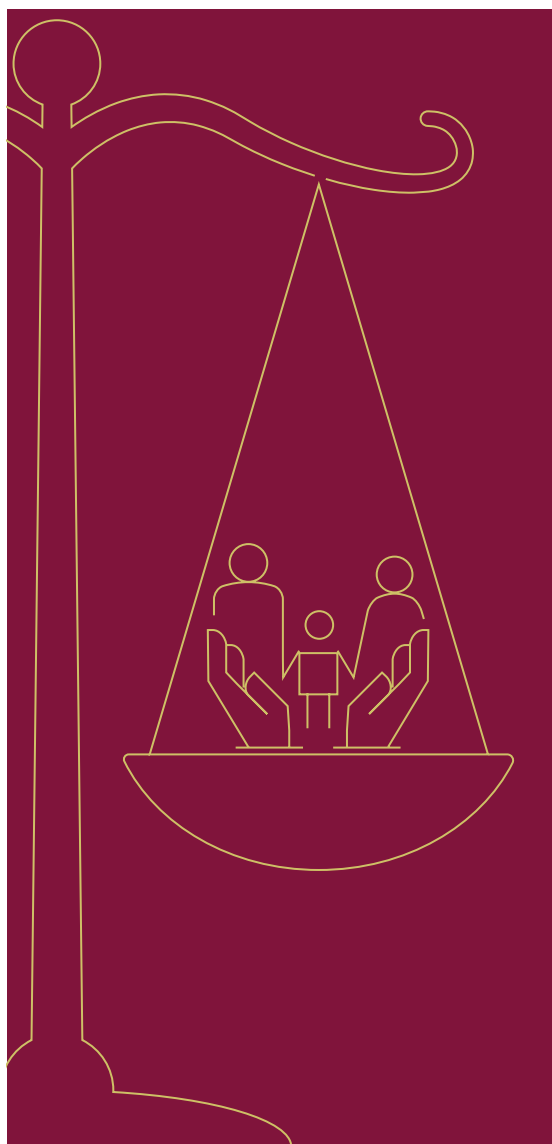


NEWSLETTER

Family Violence and Family Law Community of Practice Newsletter



Many family violence victims seek support through family court proceedings in order to find safety for themselves and their children. They may be reluctant to engage with legal professionals due to financial constraints and bullying tactics perpetrated by their partners. Since March 2020, due to COVID-19, there has been reduced access to courts, lawyers, and other court-related professionals as court services went virtual and family courts were only hearing urgent matters. Access to emotional support is also complicated at the present time due to COVID-19 further isolating and endangering victims of family violence who may be already trapped in abusive relationships. Many victims either forgo court or seek to represent themselves which is an overwhelming task.

Many family violence victims have experienced ongoing trauma due to the violence or abuse experienced and may be coping with fear, anxiety, memory problems and other symptoms associated with traumatic stress. Engaging with the legal system may contribute to this stress and may have a profound impact on mental and physical health and well-being.

There are many challenges to be addressed to improve experiences for survivors of family violence as they engage with the family court system. Upcoming changes to the Divorce Act which will include a detailed and expansive definition of family violence, and implementation of a trauma-informed approach in court are two examples of initiatives that may contribute to improved health outcomes for those engaging in the family court system supported by collaboration and knowledge sharing across the family violence and family law sectors.

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Funding Announcement

A press conference was held via Zoom on November 25, 2020 to announce funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada for a new project: Supporting the health of survivors of family violence in family law proceedings. The project will foster collaboration between the family violence and family law sectors through various knowledge mobilization activities. Five Communities of Practice will be established across Canada through the Alliance of Canadian Research Centres on Gender-Based Violence. The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) at Western University will take the lead for the project and facilitate a Community of Practice in Southwestern Ontario.

Press release and details are available at:

 [Protecting family-violence survivors - Faculty of Education - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](https://www.uwo.ca/facultyofeducation/protecting-family-violence-survivors/)

 [Western University \(learningtoendabuse.ca\)](https://learningtoendabuse.ca/)



Illustrative image

Five Communities of Practice

Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children,

Western University

www.learningtoendabuse.ca

Project Leads: Peter Jaffe and Katreena Scott

FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, Simon Fraser University

www.fredacentre.com

Project Lead: Margaret Jackson

Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research,

University of New Brunswick

www.unb.ca/mmfc

Project Lead: Karla O'Regan and LA Henry

RESOLVE, University of Manitoba

www.umanitoba.ca/resolve

Project Lead: Kendra Nixon

Recherches Appliquées et Interdisciplinaires sur les Violences intimes, familiales et structurelles,

Université Laval

www.raiv.ulaval.ca

Project Leads: Dominique Bernier and Geneviève Lessard

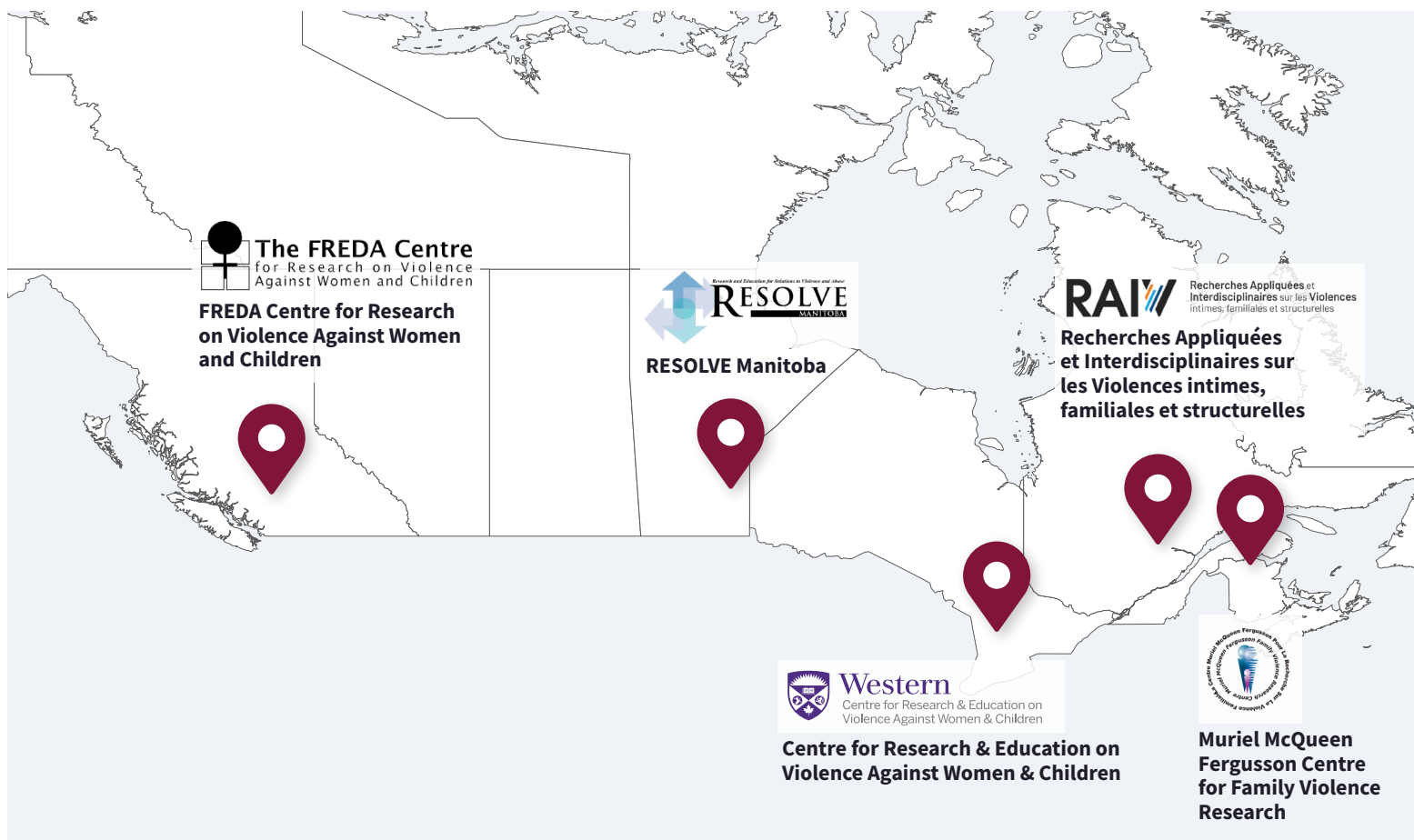


Figure 1. Location of the Five Communities of Practice (map of Canada)

Southwestern Ontario Community of Practice

The Community of Practice for Southwestern Ontario consists of representatives from the Family Law and Family Violence sectors and women with lived experience.

The Community of Practice will meet quarterly. All meetings will take place virtually for the time being until it is deemed safe to do otherwise. A calendar of dates will be circulated shortly.

To learn more about the Southern Ontario Community of Practice, visit our website:

 [Supporting the Health of Survivors of Family Violence in Family Law Proceedings - CREVAWC - Western University \(learningtoendabuse.ca\)](http://learningtoendabuse.ca)

Community of Practice members are:

Abir Al Jamal, Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (offers culturally integrated services, counselling and support to families from collectivist cultures) www.mrcssi.com

Dan Ashbourne, London Family Court Clinic (conducts custody and access assessments and parenting coordination services) [Homepage - LFCC](#)

Amanda Bruyns, Merrymount Children's Services (supervised access centre in London, ON) [Supervised Access Program — Merrymount](#)

Jennifer Foster, McKenzie Lake Lawyers (a law firm with a focus on family law) www.mckenzielake.com

Kim Harris, London Family Court Clinic (conducts custody and access assessments and parenting coordination services) [Homepage - LFCC](#)

Tim Kelly, Changing Ways (offers counselling and education programs for men who have been abusive towards their intimate partners) [Men's Programs — Changing Ways](#)

Julie Lee, Western University Community Legal Services (community legal clinic and clinical education program with funding from Legal Aid Ontario, Law Foundation of Ontario, Fanshawe Student Union and Western University) [Community Legal Services - Western Law - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

Najia Mahmud, Najia Mahmud Law (private practise lawyer focusing on matrimonial and family law in a culturally competent manner) [About — Najia Mahmud \(najiamahmudlaw.com\)](#)

Diane Meikle, Legal Aid Ontario (subsidized legal support for those who qualify) www.legalaid.on.ca

Susan Schiedel, Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex (protects children and strengthens families and is legally mandated by the Child and Family Services Act) [Services - Children's Aid Society London and Middlesex \(caslondon.on.ca\)](#)

Lainie Tessier, Womenatthecentre (an organization by and for women survivors of gender-based violence that provides personal and social advocacy, and conducts research on intersecting topics) www.womenatthecentre.com

Jaimie Torok, Womenatthecentre (an organization by and for women survivors of gender-based violence that provides personal and social advocacy, and conducts research on intersecting topics) www.womenatthecentre.com

AnnaLise Trudell, ANOVA (women's intimate partner violence shelter, transition housing and sexual violence counselling) <http://www.anovafuture.org/>

Kara Verberne, St. Joseph's Health Centre, Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program (hospital -based regional program providing medical care and social support to people who have experienced sexual assault or domestic violence) [Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program | St. Joseph's Health Care London](#)

Matthew Villeneuve, McKenzie Lake Lawyers (a law firm with a focus on family law) www.mckenzielake.com

Knowledge Mobilization Activities

This project will focus on a number of knowledge mobilization activities to share information and raise awareness regarding issues related to family violence and family law as identified by the Community of Practice. The information will be shared through:

- Website [Supporting the Health of Survivors of Family Violence in Family Law Proceedings - CREVAWC - Western University \(learningtoendabuse.ca\)](https://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/supporting-the-health-of-survivors-of-family-violence-in-family-law-proceedings)
- Quarterly newsletters
- Webinars
- Briefs (reports that convey information about key issues)

Introductory Webinar

We hosted a webinar on Tuesday, December 15, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. EST. Featuring Pamela Cross and Linda Baker:

“Bridging the Gap Between the Needs of Survivors of Family Violence and the Realities of Family Court”

Pamela Cross outlined barriers to accessing family court, especially during the pandemic. She discussed proposed changes to the Divorce Act and the need for enhanced training for lawyers and judges related to family violence. Linda Baker described how the mental health impacts of family violence may play a role in how family violence survivors present themselves in court or prevent them from even accessing the court system. She discussed how trauma-informed approaches may lead to improved outcomes for those engaging in the court system.



▶ Recording link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWz8kDCdero&feature=emb_title

🌐 Presentation slides (English): <http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/our-work/our-projects-resources/supporting-the-health-of-survivors-of-family-violence-in-family-law-proceedings/Webinar-Slides-EN.pdf>

🌐 Presentation slides (French): <http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/our-work/our-projects-resources/supporting-the-health-of-survivors-of-family-violence-in-family-law-proceedings/Webinar-slides-FR.pdf>

Family Violence & Family Law Brief

Supporting the Health of
Survivors of Family Violence
in Family Law Proceedings

Issue 1 | February 2021



Introductory Brief: Family Violence and Family Law Brief #1

This brief provides an overview of current challenges confronting various legal professionals, mental health researchers, and family violence advocates who engage with family courts to support survivors who are navigating the system. While all sectors aim to achieve justice and healing, the institutional contexts in which they operate often lead to different problems when addressing family conflicts creating a sense of unfairness and frustration, and potential harm and/or re-traumatization for survivors of violence.

Important insights and considerations from these perspectives are provided to deepen our collective understanding of the issues. This includes how the growing call for “trauma-informed” court proceedings might be met with the “trauma- and violence-informed” approaches developed within the gender-based violence and health sectors. In recognition of the fact that women and children are statistically overrepresented as victims of family violence, the brief discusses how a gendered, intersectional lens may help to contextualize the experiences of survivors who are engaged in the family court system. Lastly, the brief outlines the objectives of the Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Survivors of Family Violence in Family Law Proceedings project, and explains how a Community of Practice can provide fruitful opportunities for further cross-sector knowledge mobilization.

Planned release date: February 2021



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children

Project Team

Peter Jaffe, Academic Director pjaffe@uwo.ca

Katreena Scott, Incoming Academic Director kscot47@uwo.ca

Robert Nonomura, Research Coordinator rnonomur@uwo.ca

Julie Poon, Research Manager jpoon58@uwo.ca

Anna-Lee Straatman, Project Manager astraat2@uwo.ca