

Preventing violence across the lifespan research network (PreVAiL)

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Funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the PreVAiL Research Network: A Centre for Research Development in Gender, Mental Health and Violence Across the Lifespan is composed of an international team of over 50 investigators and partners. It has three main objectives: (1) to increase knowledge about the links between mental health impairment, gender and exposure to child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, in Canada and internationally; (2) to develop interventions to prevent or reduce child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and subsequent mental health problems; and (3) to develop and promote an integrated research and knowledge translation and exchange agenda among a network of established and new researchers and key stakeholders.

The co-principal investigators are Harriet MacMillan, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, and of Pediatrics at McMaster University (who is also the VPA focal person); Donna Stewart, University Professor and Chair of Women's Health at University Health Network and University of Toronto; and Nadine Wathen, Associate Professor of Information and Media Studies, The University of Western Ontario. International co-principal investigators are Jeffrey Coben, Professor of Emergency Medicine and of Community Medicine, West Virginia University and Helen Herrman, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne.

The research is organized around 3 themes. Under Theme 1 – the Gender/Mental Health/Violence Network – members of the international, multidisciplinary network will review the evidence for preventing child maltreatment and intimate partner violence and the impairment in mental health associated with these exposures and develop strategies for enhancing existing interventions and developing new ones.

Theme 2 is entitled "Understanding and Fostering Resilient Mental Health Outcomes in the Context of Violence across the Lifespan". Research increasingly demonstrates that social contexts and policies may be good predictors of resilience. We will explore resilience across the lifespan in males and females in Canadian, Australian, Danish and Indian violent contexts by quantitative analyses of databases, qualitative methods, and extensive reviews of the published and grey literature.

Under Theme 3 – "Innovations in Knowledge Translation and Exchange Strategies and Research Methods Specific to Mental Health, Gender and Violence across the Lifespan" – we are bringing together leading researchers in Themes 1 and 2 with experts in knowledge translation and exchange to develop "evidence-based meta-narratives" that synthesize findings across studies and contexts to begin providing integrated messages about violence and its impact on mental health for men and women.

VPA focal person



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Harriet MacMillan, MD, MSc, FRCPC is a psychiatrist and pediatrician conducting family violence research. She is a member of the Offord Centre for Child Studies, and Professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, and Pediatrics at McMaster University with associate memberships in the Departments of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, and Psychology. Harriet holds the David R. (Dan) Offord Chair in Child Studies, and has received funding support from the WT Grant Foundation, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, NARSAD and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Beginning in 1993 until 2004, Harriet was the founding Director of the Child Advocacy and Assessment Program (CAAP) at McMaster Children's Hospital, a multidisciplinary program committed to reducing the burden of suffering associated with family violence. Her research focuses on the epidemiology of violence against children and women, including prevention of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence. She has led randomized controlled trials investigating the effectiveness of such approaches as universal screening in reducing intimate partner violence and nurse home visitation in preventing the recurrence of physical abuse and neglect among children.