

OFF THE VANIER BOOKSHELF

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Intimate partner abuse is a prevalent public health and social issue in Canada, one that has gained increasing attention among researchers, policy-makers and the public over the past several decades. Despite growing recognition about family violence and the role that economic dependence plays in perpetuating abusive relationships, there have been few empirical analyses into the labour market outcomes of women who have experienced intimate partner abuse in Canada. Linda DeRiviere addresses this knowledge gap in *The Healing Journey*, where she provides the reader with a rigorous exploration of the relationship between family violence and the labour market.

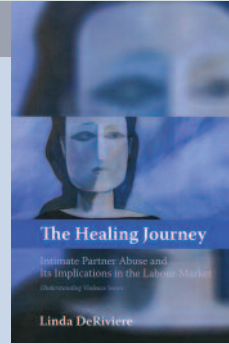
Women who have experienced intimate partner violence often face multiple barriers to permanently leaving abusive relationships, such as love or concern for the abusive partner, social isolation, external pressures and fear for safety. But economic independence is a major factor in “revolving door” relationships, in which women repeatedly separate from their partners, only to return later on. DeRiviere’s book uses data from a unique tri-provincial Canadian study of 414 women to look at the impact that intimate partner abuse has on their employment, earnings and vocational training outcomes throughout their “healing journey.”

DeRiviere shows that despite the diversity of occupations, work experiences and education levels of the women in the study, they faced similar labour market disadvantages resulting from their experience of abuse. While seeking economic independence through paid labour (efforts often hampered by interference from their abusers), they faced a “segregated” labour market in which they regularly wound up in “dead-end” jobs that offered flat lifetime earnings and little flexibility. Many had histories of infrequent and erratic employment resulting from abusive relationships, which prevented them from fully developing work skills needed to thrive in a climate of labour market restructuring and rapid technological advancement. Once they had left these relationships and become heads of their households, many of the women found themselves unable to earn a family wage.

Another reason abused women face difficulty in the labour market is their high likelihood of developing

The Healing Journey: Intimate Partner Abuse and Its Implications in the Labour Market

Linda DeRiviere. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2014.



DeRiviere provides a rigorous empirical analysis of the labour market outcomes of women who have experienced intimate partner abuse.

chronic physical and mental health conditions resulting from the violence they experienced. DeRiviere’s findings are consistent with existing literature that finds abused women having high rates of chronic pain, post-traumatic stress and depressive symptoms – all of which impact their ability to fully participate in the labour market, even after the abusive relationship ends. As a result, government income supports and community resources became all the more essential for these people.

One particularly valuable and unique aspect of *The Healing Journey* is DeRiviere’s discussion of the impact of intimate partner abuse on the aspirations of women. Interviews before and after women left their abusive partners revealed that despite their overall resilience, approximately half had substantially downscaled their aspirations and expectations due to their physical/mental health issues, ongoing financial struggles, desire for stability and lack of time for educational pursuits.

The Healing Journey is an important read for anyone seeking to better understand intimate partner abuse and the effects it has on women and society. DeRiviere’s work is theoretically grounded and uses recent qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate the complex and multifaceted impacts of family violence, as well as the crucial role that supports can play in facilitating healing journeys. While the consequences of abuse extend well beyond the labour market, DeRiviere’s focus on this critical element of women’s independence makes *The Healing Journey* a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion of intimate partner abuse in Canada. ♥

Nathan Battams is a writer and researcher at the Vanier Institute of the Family.



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