

# Gender and Human Security Issues

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**Rosalind Boyd, Ph.D**  
Director

Participatory action-research requires time to evolve in a meaningful way. At this juncture we can see a fruitful consolidation of our team and important new work that has emerged. Our common commitment to ensure assistance to women immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers from situations of violence remains unwavering. We are confident that the new intervention model is responding to their needs.

In this Newsletter, two components of our research program are highlighted: the WCM's on-going work with self-help groups of African women in Montreal; and the one-day seminar focusing on adolescent girls' education in the immigrant and refugee communities. We also describe the new project on post-traumatic stress among refugee women and their children.

Since our program began in March 2000, there is a new world context to our work, which requires added attention. Issues of immigration, refugees and asylum-seekers have moved to central concern in international politics. New policy restrictions, added limitations and tightening of border controls seem to be the order of the day. We shall however continue to work for an open and generous approach to those in fear or in need, one that strives to improve the lives of women and hopefully contributes to their sense of daily comfort and security. We also plan to work specifically with our partner in the field, EASSI, on women's peace building initiatives in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and to ensure that our results are presented in appropriate forums locally and abroad.

**Johanne Bélisle, s.w.**  
Co-director

With the yearend approaching, it is appropriate to look back on what has been achieved. During that period, we can ascertain that the links between the members of the Gender and Human Security Issues (GHSI) Program's team were reinforced and that the various tasks were undertaken without a hitch. Also noticeable, was the vast and rich expertise demonstrated among the group and the importance of a multi-disciplinary comprehensive approach. This in order to offer adequate services to a very vulnerable clientele and to ensure the transmission of new information.

This past year also showed that in spite of numerous challenges, two very different environments, the academic and the non-profit sectors, can come together and accomplish great things, benefiting both.

Confident of the success of the first part of the program, we are entering another phase of the program which is particularly pertinent to the WCM with the setting up of a fourth group, the production of a practical guide aimed at professionals who may wish to use this intervention model, as well as the publication of our findings.



## P A R T N E R S

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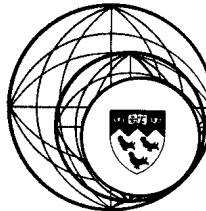
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*The Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS), McGill University, founded in 1963, is an interdisciplinary institution facilitating and conducting research on development issues primarily with a social science perspective related to developing areas.*

[www.mcgill.ca/cdas](http://www.mcgill.ca/cdas)

## *Over There and Over Here*

*A one-day seminar  
on working with immigrant  
and refugee adolescent girls*

*For a summary of the day, see page 5*



*The mission of the Women's Centre of Montreal (WCM) is to provide services to help women help themselves. To accomplish its mission, the Centre offers educational and vocational training, information, counselling and referral services. This non-profit organization communicates women's concerns to the public and acts as a catalyst for change regarding women's issues.*

[www.centredefemmesdemtl.org](http://www.centredefemmesdemtl.org)

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The Gender and Human Security Issues Newsletter is produced twice a year and is available on the GHSI program website.

## Women's Centre of Montreal Self-help Groups for African Women Who Were Victims of Orchestrated Violence: First Assessments

Anne Benoit

For two years, the Women's Centre of Montreal has been developing a self-help group model aimed at responding to the needs of women who experience a painful and invading past, and who live in a precarious present. Until now, three groups have been formed with participants from the DRC, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria and Burundi. They are all immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers. The group interventions are based on the following three objectives: to encourage encounters and exchanges between women with similar life experiences; to facilitate expression of their losses; to promote women's personal resources and faculty to be pro-active; and, for those who have been accepted, to support the integration process to their new countries, and to provide the essential psychological support to the others.

The self-help group meetings, facilitated by interns Maria Camila Chica (Bachelor in Social Work) and Anne Benoit (Master in Art Therapy), focus mainly on an individual artistic activity followed by a session in which each participant shares with the group their creation and the emotions associated with it. The project's evolution and the participants' testimonies in their three groups have led the facilitators to conclude that the use of art as a means of expression combined with the group experience is appropriate for the creation of a non-threatening atmosphere for self-expression. This context respects participants' rhythm and personal / cultural defenses; provides a relaxed setting; and helps participants to bring up subjects that may be difficult to express verbally and to discover a healthy and creative space in each of them. Sharing the art pieces with the group multiplies the power of this expression and allows the participants to identify themselves with other women. Each self-help group allows women who have experienced violence to start a process by which they can shed their feelings of alienation, shame, fear, and anger by re-learning to trust in others and themselves and by re-discovering the feeling that they exist.

Based on participants' recommendations in groups 1 and 2, and the facilitators' experiences, some modifications were made to group 3's model of self-help. A time has been allocated at the end of each group meeting where Maria Camila Chica gives a presentation on subjects of practical interest such as the process of seeking asylum, resources and services available in Montreal, the cultural shock, etc. A. Benoit and M. Chica also offer individually-based consultations with each participant during the group session. At

the end of the third self-help group, it is possible to say that the objectives were reached and that the intervention model is more and more responsive to the real needs of these women in building an identity and working through their traumatic experiences to find new points of reference.

A fourth group will start in January 2003. In collaboration with Maria Camila Chica, Anne Benoit and other partners in the GHSI program, the WCM will develop an intervention guide for facilitators working in the domain of health and social services who may want to start up similar self-help groups.

Testimony from a self-help group participant:

*"The art provided a very effective healing process: relaxing and cathartic. Sometimes you don't even know what you want to express. By doing art, it gets easier to get in touch with your emotions. Because I wouldn't be too sure what to think or feel about this or that subject, doing art helped me to clarify my thoughts and feelings about that particular subject. It helped me to realize things; like in this collage, I ended up expressing something I felt but didn't know! Also, sharing about (our respective) artwork was a doorway to share about deeper emotions and to know people better and feel compassion for each other." (Celina)*

### THE GHSI PROGRAM RECENTLY HAD FRUITFUL EXCHANGES WITH THREE AFRICAN VISITORS IN MONTREAL:

**Asha El Karib**, Executive Manager, Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD), Sudan.

**Fatuma Ndangiza**, Executive Secretary, Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda

**Baudouin K. Hamuli**, Executive Director, «Centre national d'appui au Développement et à la participation populaire», Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## Visit in the Field by Graduate Students

Jackie Kirk

Claudia Mitchell, partner in the Gender and Human Security Issues Program, and her two research assistants Jackie Kirk and Stephanie Garrow, Ph.D candidates at the Faculty of Education, McGill, recently returned from Kampala, Uganda after attending the 8<sup>th</sup> International Disciplinary Congress on Women entitled, *Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges*.

This conference, organized by the Department for Gender and Women's Studies at Makerere University, Kampala, was a landmark event for African women especially as it brought together over 2000 academics, practitioners and grass-roots partners in 5 days of workshops, presentations, events and other activities around different themes of concern to women.

Women and conflict was one of the key themes of the conference. The program included presentations from individual women and grass-roots organizations particularly from East Africa, from international organizations such as ISIS-WICCE whose mandate is to document the lives of women in conflict areas, and from academics and development workers working with these women.

Particularly significant was the strong participation of women from Northern Uganda whose own experiences of conflict, insecurity and instability often get forgotten in a country which elsewhere is relatively peaceful. Also striking was the participation of a number of Sudanese women who spoke out about their exclusion from recent high-level peace-talks, but who were constantly engaged in their own local activities to build peace between different communities.

Jackie, Claudia and Stephanie were able to organize a very productive meeting with the GHSI Program partner organization in the region, the East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI). They discussed the future strategic priorities of EASSI and brainstormed some new partnership ideas to bring back to the GHSI program. Maude Mugisha, the EASSI coordinator, who came to Montreal last November, was also very involved in the Women's World Conference, as were other members of her team.

For more information about the conference, or for copies of the workshops/presentations made by the McGill team (*Opening up Critical Spaces: Using Feminist and Post-*

*colonial Analysis to Explore Some Current Education Challenges, and Models and Methods: Mapping Innovative Partnerships for Girls' Education in Uganda*) please contact: jackie.kirk@mail.mcgill.ca; sgarrow@videotron.ca; claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca. Telephone: 514-398-1318

### NEW CDAS DISCUSSION PAPERS GHSI Program Series

Recently published:

No.3: GERVAIS, Myriam. "*Sécurité humaine: Approche centrée sur les problèmes structurels*". May 2002. 20 pp.

Considering that the human security concept is more and more used for different purposes but without being strictly defined, this paper tries to answer some essential questions. What is human security? Who is the first actor responsible for its application? How could a secure environment be restored in a post-conflict situation? Based in part on the Rwanda case and on the author's previous works, this reflection suggests elements for a comprehensive approach addressing human security issues.

Available on the GHSI program website and at CDAS.

No 4: JAMAL, Manal. *The Disengagement of the Palestinian Women's Movement: Reconsidering Social Movement Theory*. September 2002. 17 pp.

Among the most notable phenomena of post-war transitions is the demobilization and marginalization of previously active grassroots organizations, and the inability of these groups to effectively mobilize after the transition. Developments in the Palestinian women's movement in the post-Madrid period are illustrative of this point. By the mid-1970s, popularly-based organizations became the backbone of the Palestinian women's movement. These popularly-based organizations reached their zenith during the 1988-1993 intifada. Beginning with the Madrid peace conference, the Palestinian women's movement began to experience unprecedented demobilization. These developments in the women's movement coincided with the increased institutionalization of the movement, and unprecedented financial support from the international community.

Available at CDAS.

## Over There and Over Here

A one-day seminar  
on working with immigrant and refugee adolescent girls

Organized by Claudia Mitchell (partner in the GHSI program) and Jackie Kirk (PhD candidate, Education, McGill), the seminar “Over There and Over Here” focused on participatory approaches and issues of girls’ education as applied to refugee and immigrant adolescents “over here” and to adolescent girls or adolescent refugee girls “over there”. Participants included students and teachers from one elementary school and several high schools, universities (McGill, Concordia, University de Montreal), community organizations, UNESCO, and professionals working with adolescents from the immigrant and refugee communities.

Following the welcoming speech by Claudia Mitchell and Johanne Bélisle (co-director of the GHSI program and Executive Director at the Women Centre of Montreal), the day started with an overview of issues in relation to adolescent girls from immigrant and refugee communities. The plenary speaker, Yasmin Jiwani (Department of Communications, Concordia University, and researcher in legal frameworks for looking at human rights activism, women and violence) spoke on what she referred to as the politics for immigrant and refugee women who are “walking the hyphen”. Referring to “walking the hyphen”, she spoke of the difficulty new immigrants may feel when crossing back and forth between two cultures. There are costs to transgressing the rules of a culture whether it is one’s own culture or the one of the adoptive countries. Particular poignant was her own autobiographical narrative in this discussion. Her talk was followed by presentations from two respondents, Cécile Marotte (RIVO; Intervention network for people having been subjected to organized violence) and Maryse Darsigny (Y des femmes

de Montréal). Cécile Marotte addressed specifically the situation of non-accompanied children arriving in Canada. Statistics show that these cases are increasing each year in spite of the fact that it is an extremely traumatic situation for children to be placed in. From another perspective, Maryse Darsigny presented the tools that they developed to make individuals and organizations culturally aware; later on, trainee participants themselves will become facilitators in their own milieux.

Following these presentations, Sarah Stevenson and Martine Bernier of Save the Children gave a workshop on participatory approaches on working with adolescent girls. The underlying principle is that children’s participation in decision-making on issues that may have an impact on them is a right that they have and not only a privilege. They drew attention in particular to the double-issue for girls for whom both age and gender present challenges.

Later in the afternoon, two girls, Patricia and Tomzine from Leave Out Violence – LOVE, spoke about the difficulties that they faced after moving to Montreal. They, and other adolescents in this organization use media (photographs, newspapers, songs, poetry) to uniquely express their sometimes difficult experiences. Their narratives reinforced reflections shared earlier by Yasmin Jiwani.

Reinforcing the bridge between the “Over Here” and the “Over There” component of the day, Ph. D students Jackie Kirk, Stephanie Garrow (Education, McGill) and Mariam Kakkar (Educational Technology, Concordia) shared with the audience the results of their respective research projects related to girls’ education issues in developing countries, particularly the way it affects young Afghan women in Pakistani



Claudia Mitchell is wrapping up the day in a plenary. Students include Anusha Balachandran and Jessica Buresi, both Education Students in the Bachelor of Education program for Secondary teachers, McGill University.

(continued on page 6)

## NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

### A Review of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Refugee Women and Their Children / Miranda D'Amico

This research project aims to better understand the emotional issues that refugee women and survivors of trauma may experience in their resettled country. It also reports on a program that has been put in place at the WCM that helps meet the mental health needs of these women and their children and describes the creative interventions that have been integrated at the WCM along with other social services. In order to do this, a literature review will discuss the support programs currently in place for women refugees in Canada. This project will see if the effects of post-traumatic stress are taken into account in programs which seek to aid the integration of refugee women into Canadian society.

### Conference Human Security, Development, and Canadian Aid Policy

By Miek Van Gaalen

On October 18, 2002, Professor Jean Daudelin shared with the CDAS audience his views on the correlation between human security, development and Canadian Aid policy. He explained that although the concept of human security seems to be new in the development context, it has always been guided by security principles, mentioning as a concrete example the international policies during the Cold War, the functioning of the Bretton Woods institutions and the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War.

The emerging new conflicts after the Cold War have brought security issues higher on the development agenda again since most conflicts were (or are) occurring in poor countries, and in fact most poor countries were (or are) in conflict. Human security is an idea that is being interpreted in very different ways according to Professor Daudelin. First there is the not unanimously accepted UNDP approach (1994) which makes human security a *condition* for human development, with development as a freedom of choices. Secondly, there is the "Ottawa doctrine", promoted by Mr. Lloyd Axworthy (Ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada, 1996-2000), implying that security of States means security of people. In this approach, issues such as the international criminal court, child soldiers and landmines came up on the international development agenda. Finally, there is the idea of human *insecurity* as a *consequence* of development, and that sustainable development should be treated as a security issue.

Canadian foreign policy has shifted around these ideas throughout the years, but according to Professor Daudelin, it

is still not clear how conflict fits in to the development agenda. In his view, conflict implications should be integrated in the design, development and evaluation of development policies. However, he concluded that human security and development should remain two different items on the agenda.

\* *Miek Van Gaalen worked for the GHSI Program as a research assistant in 2002.*

### Over There and Over Here (continued from page 5)

refugee camps and young girls in Uganda and other African countries. The audience learned that the girls' access to education is an issue taken into consideration in refugee camps, particularly by donor agencies. Interestingly enough in comparison to the practices "over here", the participatory approach is well implanted "over there". For example, in Uganda, the GEM program (Girls' Education Movement) supported by international agencies for over a year now, uses the participatory approach to act on issues affecting the lives of girls such as gender-based violence and gender-sensitive teaching and learning. Some adolescent girls are being recognized as experts in their own lives and, as such are involved in the program as key actors in the formulation and implementation of solutions to problems that affect them.

Claudia Mitchell wrapped up the day in a plenary session where she invited the participants to share their thoughts on new perspectives brought by this one-day seminar. In particular, she raised the point that having a sense of community is important, and where conference participants might have begun the day representing a number of communities, what was transpiring during the day was a sense of the emergence of a new 'girlhood-focused' community.

The event, funded by the GHSI program, brought together approximately 75 participants. A report about the event is available upon request to: jackie.kirk@mail.mcgill.ca