Clare's Law Travels to Alberta: Undesired Consequences and Repercussions of Bill 17

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the proposed legislation entitled “Clare’s Law” which will be implemented in Alberta in June of 2020. Clare’s Law has been used as a response to the alarming reported rates of domestic violence around the world. Clare Wood was a woman who was killed by her ex-partner; she contacted the police numerous times over an extended period of time but was never assisted. Clare’s Law provides individuals with the right to know and the right to ask. This will allow concerned individuals to inquire about the criminal records of one’s partner. Furthermore, it requires emergency responders to inform individuals of one’s criminal history if it pertains to domestic violence. Premier Jason Kenney is addressing the alarming reported rates of domestic violence by enacting Clare’s Law in Alberta. This paper explores the benefits and concerns surrounding the implementation of such legislation. Clare’s Law may provide individuals with awareness of their partners criminal history regarding domestic violence; however, this paper’s main argument is that Clare’s Law will not be effective and will cause more harm than good. The Law does not increase services, shelters or support for victims of violence. Furthermore, it may provoke victim blaming and it assumes accountability by police services and judicial systems that have continually failed victims. This paper is significant due to the significant rate of domestic violence in Alberta. This paper states that incidences of domestic violence will not improve because of Clare’s Law and could make situations worse for victims of domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, Clare’s Law, right to know, right to ask,

Introduction

Alberta has the third highest rate of domestic violence (DV) in all of Canada (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019; Fieldberg, 2019; Russell, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2018). In response to the alarming rates of DV increasing in Alberta, Premier Jason Kenney is proposing Bill 17: The Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare’s Law) Act (Fieldberg, 2019; Russell, 2019). Bill 17 is inspired by Clare’s Law which was enacted in England as a response to the death of Clare Wood. Clare Wood was

killed by her ex-partner in a domestic incident (Fieldberg, 2019; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Griffith, 2014; Griffith, 2017; Russell, 2019; Strickland, 2013; Taylor, 2019). As in Clare’s Law, Bill 17 will include the ‘right to know’ and the ‘right to ask’ for information about an individual’s past history of DV. Although it is admirable for the Provincial Government of Alberta to tackle the domestic abuse crisis, criticism has risen regarding the effectiveness of Clare’s Law legislation. Survivors of DV are overwhelmingly Indigenous females (Comack, 2018; Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019;

Wuerch et al., 2019). Thus, it is imperative that DV legislation addresses this overrepresentation and views the crisis as a gendered issue. For the purpose of this essay, the term survivor refers to women and this paper will identify a variety of barriers that are experienced by this population. I have chosen to use the term “survivor” instead of “victim” to describe this population to avoid victim-blaming narratives that are identified further into this paper. It is also important to recognize that individuals who experience DV may prefer to identify as a victim and that both terms are valid.

This paper will begin by explaining who Clare Wood was and why Clare’s Law was implemented in England. This paper will then identify the current prevalence of DV in Alberta. However, the primary focus of this paper is Alberta’s Bill 17 (Clare’s Law), and the benefits and critiques that develop alongside this legislation. The main benefit that is identified in this paper is that Bill 17 recognizes the alarming rate of DV occurring in Alberta today. Despite this, this paper argues that the critiques outweigh the benefits; the main critiques explored in this paper are: Bill 17’s inability to address factors that perpetuate DV, the tremendous amount of confidence placed into systems that continually fail survivors, and the potential for Bill 17 to generate victim blaming by the general public and the judicial system. Alberta urgently needs to address the devastating rates of DV; however, the proposed legislation of Bill 17 fails to consider undesired consequences and repercussions.

Methodology

The data source for this paper was the University of Alberta’s online library, where I read numerous articles regarding Clare’s Law, victimized and criminalized women, and other relevant themes. In addition, classroom discussions and assigned readings were used from the University of Alberta’s Sociology

430 class entitled “Women and Crime”, taught by Dr. Jana Grekul. Lastly, I contacted an employee from a local Women’s Shelter, WINGS of Providence, to gain a front-line worker’s perspective on the proposed legislation. I have maintained a working relationship with WINGS of Providence over the past three years and I obtained consent from my professor to include their opinions on Bill 17 in this paper. The various sources of data included in this paper acknowledges the varying perspectives on DV legislation such as Clare’s Law and Bill 17.

Clare’s Law

In February of 2009, Clare Wood, a 36-year-old woman from England, fell victim to DV (Fieldberg, 2019; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Griffith, 2014; Griffith, 2017; Russell, 2019; Strickland, 2013; Taylor, 2019). It was stated within the Coroner’s report that Clare Wood died by strangulation. She met her murderer, George Appleton, on an online dating site. Months before Clare Wood was murdered, she had contacted the Manchester police regarding George Appleton’s aggressive actions towards her. However, the Manchester Police failed to look into the incident, and chose not to investigate Wood’s complaint. Clare Wood did not receive support or assistance from the police; assistance which may have prevented her death. After the murder, the Independent Police Complaints Commission examined the actions of the Manchester police (or lack there-of). In response to this, the UK government enacted “Clare’s Law”, otherwise known as the Domestic Violent Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) in response to the injustice against Clare Wood.

DV can occur in many forms and includes neglect and physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2015). In addition, types of DV include intimate partner violence (IPV), child abuse and neglect, and elder abuse, to name a few. For the purpose

of this paper, DV will refer to IPV and I will use the terms interchangeably. The Government of Canada Department of Justice (2015) classifies IPV as “violence or abuse that happens: within a marriage, common-law or dating relationship; in an opposite-sex or same-sex relationship; [and] at any time during a relationship, including while it is breaking down, or after it has ended.” DV also often includes an individual’s demand for power and control within the relationship (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2015). Abuse often worsens over time, leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in many survivors.

Clare’s Law, or the DVDS, was created in hopes of saving future individuals, like Clare, from DV. This law is composed of two elements; one the ‘right to ask’ and second the ‘right to know’ (Fieldberg, 2019; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Griffith, 2014; Griffith, 2017; Russell, 2019; Strickland, 2013; Taylor, 2019). The ‘right to ask’ refers to an individual’s ability to request any information regarding another’s history of violence. Family members, friends, or the individual in the relationship can request such information from the police. If the police find relevant information referring to the violent history of the individual, they have the duty to inform the requestee. However, this step is only carried out if the police believe it will protect the survivor. Put simply, the ‘right to ask’ refers to an individual “proactively [seeking] information” on a third party’s criminal history (Griffith, 2017, p. 636).

The ‘right to know’, refers to the police forces’ responsibility to inform an individual of their partner’s violent history (Fieldberg, 2019; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Griffith, 2014; Griffith, 2017; Russell, 2019; Strickland, 2013; Taylor, 2019). For example, a police officer that is summoned to a violent domestic dispute can search the names of both parties involved. Through this, the police officer may learn that one of the individuals

has a criminal history involving DV. One’s ‘right to know’ would require the police officer to inform the individual of their partner’s criminal history. Clare’s Law has been implemented in various jurisdictions all over the world (such as the province of Saskatchewan, and parts of the United Kingdom and Australia) as a response to high rates of DV (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017).

Prevalence of DV in Canada

As mentioned above, Alberta has one of the highest rates of DV in all of Canada (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019; Fieldberg, 2019; Russell, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2018). In 2017, there were 95,704 reported survivors of IPV in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018). Of this total 13,715 were from Alberta (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019). Nationally, women represent the overwhelming majority of survivors in domestically violent incidents and represent nearly 80% of Albertan survivors (Comack, 2018; Wuerch et al., 2019). In addition, Indigenous women in Canada are four times more likely to suffer from domestic violence than non-indigenous women (Brownridge, 2008; Wuerch et al., 2019). Indigenous women experience abuse that is more frequent and violent when compared to non-Indigenous women. It is important to stress that these numbers only reflect violence that were reported to police; it is estimated that approximately 70% of DV incidents are not reported to police (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Bill 17

Prior to the 2019 Provincial election, Jason Kenney, leader of Alberta’s United Conservative Party (UCP), announced that he would tackle the significantly high rates of DV in the province (Fieldberg, 2019; Russell, 2019). After he was elected as the 18th Premier of Alberta on April 30, 2019, Kenney kept his promise and announced Bill 17: the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic

Violence (Clare's Law) Act. If enacted, the Bill will include the 'right to ask' and the 'right to know' as defined above. Minister of Community and Social Services, Rajan Sawhney, stated that the government will collaborate with various stakeholders to gain a variety of insights and knowledge to DV (Russell, 2019). These stakeholders will include "individuals with lived experience[s]... Indigenous communities... Alberta Police Agencies" and other organizations (Russell, 2019). Bill 17 has gained the attention of news media and intrigued many Albertans because there is debate on the impact it will have on survivors (Fieldberg, 2019; WINGS of Providence staff member, personal communication, November 1, 2019; Russell, 2019).

Benefits

Bill 17 is beneficial because it sheds light on DV in Alberta. Premier Kenney is acknowledging that DV is an "ongoing crisis" in Alberta and that Bill 17 is an "important preventative measure" to reduce DV rates (Russell, 2019). This piece of legislation will increase awareness among all Albertans on the extent and nature of DV occurring in the province. Another benefit of this legislation is that it provides an opportunity to learn about someone's violent history before it is too late (Fieldberg, 2019). Dianne Denovan is a woman from Alberta who influenced the petition to enact Clare's Law in Alberta. Denovan survived a domestic incident from her boyfriend of seven months. During the first seven months of her relationship she felt happy, healthy and loved. However, her outlook quickly changed after she was brutally beaten by the man she trusted and loved. She believes that Clare's Law would have saved her from DV because her ex-partner had a past history of "abusive behaviour" (Fieldberg, 2019). One could argue that if this legislation saves a single life, it is worthwhile and this Bill will, to some

degree, provide one with the "right to protection" (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). According to an employee of WINGS of Providence, a second stage women's shelter for women and children fleeing DV in Edmonton, "this law would be one more thing that can be added to the toolbox of responses to women experiencing domestic violence" (WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019). In this way, Bill 17 may serve to reduce the number of DV survivors. Naturally, "every strategy to help domestic violence is to be welcomed" (Griffith, 2014).

Critiques

At first glance, Bill 17 (or Clare's Law) seems worthy of merit; it appears to acknowledge and serve as a solution to reduce the excessive rates of DV in Alberta. However, there have been criticisms of Clare's Law in the past that may apply to Bill 17. While Bill 17 has the potential of saving lives because individuals can inquire about the criminal histories of their partners, it requires an inquiry that may never happen in the first place. This point begs several questions: *Will people choose to inquire before the suspicion of violence even begins? How long will an inquiry take before the police can notify the individual? What steps do the police need to take to protect the individual if there is a concern for safety after disclosure of IPV is made? Will the individual be referred to a shelter if there is concern for their well-being? What protocols need to be in place for police and shelters due to the nature of the inquiry outcome if the safety of the woman remains a concern?* It is critical that the questions listed above are acknowledged and answered before the implementation of new DV legislation.

It is worth mentioning that Clare's Law has also been criticized for reasons such as the cost associated with it, the influence of low reporting rates and the Law as a violation of individuals' human rights when disclosing

their criminal history, among other reasons (Grace, 2015; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). In addition, there is a paucity research regarding the effectiveness of Clare's Law in any of the jurisdictions where it has been enacted (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). Clare's Law legislation may create false hope within women seeking formal support from police; if one is told their partner's record is clear, they may assume the relationship is safe and healthy. However, since DV is typically underreported, their partner's record may come back clear simply because the previous survivor did not contact police in incidents of DV or report any information.

Saskatchewan has the highest rates of DV in Canada and was the first province to enact Clare's Law (Taylor, 2019). Hillary Aitken, the senior director of housing and DV shelters in Regina, states that the legislation "is not [going] to be the answer" to the DV crisis. Instead, she believes that survivors "lack resources to safely leave dangerous relationships" and that various barriers hinder their safety (Taylor, 2019). Hillary Aitken suggests that the government should focus on improving existing services instead of creating new pieces of legislation that will only "help a small number of victims" (Taylor, 2019). For example, Dianne Denovan from Alberta would not have been protected by Bill 17 because her partner suddenly turned violent seven months into their relationship (Fieldberg, 2019). She had no reason to investigate his past because their relationship was healthy until the incident. In order for women to file applications for Bill 17, there needs to be a suspicion of DV and that is not always present given the pattern of abuse and various types. Some women are unable to identify that their relationship is abusive, especially when one considers intergenerational trauma and life-long family violence. Ironically, Dianne Denovan's case is a major reason why Bill 17 has been proposed today in Alberta but I argue that

even she would not have benefited from it because of the reason stated above.

In the following sections, I will explore three main critiques of Bill 17. The first critique is that Bill 17 fails to address numerous factors that perpetuate DV in Canada. Second, the legislation places a great amount of confidence in the Canadian judicial system as well as police agencies that have been documented as flawed (Comack, 2018). DV is remarkably underreported and this Bill requires survivors to report abuse in order to serve its purpose. Lastly, Bill 17 may generate a victim-blaming discourse by the general public.

Contributing Factors to DV

Premier Jason Kenney described Bill 17 as a "preventative measure" for DV (Russell, 2019). Despite the preventative measures, the legislation fails to acknowledge any factors that contribute to DV. Bill 17 does not address the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator directly or address factors that perpetuate violence; it simply provides a process to approach the police to inquire about an individual's history. In addition, the Bill does not recognize that domestic abuse is a form of gender-based violence, which overwhelmingly involves females as survivors (Comack, 2018; Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019; Wuerch et al., 2019).

Furthermore, marginalized communities, specifically Indigenous women, are at a higher risk for experiencing DV (Brownridge, 2008; Wuerch et al., 2019). Indigenous women are four times more likely to experience DV in comparison to non-Indigenous women (Brownridge, 2008). Indigenous women in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were asked what their greatest health concern was and they stated that it was family violence. An Indigenous woman's experience(s) with DV are also more violent across all forms of abuse (physical, sexual,

and emotional). Indigenous women also tend to experience greater amounts of abuse after separation and “report exposure to greater severity of violence” when compared with non-Indigenous women (Wuerch et al., 2019, p. 692).

Brownridge (2008) identified social background factors, situational characteristics, and patriarchal dominance as risk factors that influence the likelihood of DV. Social background factors include young age, low education levels and previous marriage/common law arrangements. Situational characteristics include unemployment rates, cohabitation, rural residences, high alcohol abuse rates and large family sizes. Lastly, patriarchal dominance refers to the emergence of a patriarchal society as a result of the colonialization of Canada. The factors listed above strongly influence DV rates within Indigenous women. These factors are not addressed in Bill 17, which is supposed to be a “preventative measure” for DV (Russell, 2019). In addition, the legislation does not, but must, consider the reasons as to why women do not leave domestically violent relationships. Indigenous women comprise the majority of DV survivors in Canada and it is critical that they, and the factors listed above, are recognized in any DV legislation enacted by the Albertan Government.

Role of the Police and Judicial Process

One of the greatest flaws with Clare’s Law legislation is the amount of trust the government has in the court process as well as in police agencies. Griffith (2014) describes police involvement in disclosure schemes as the “biggest stumbling block” because “victims of domestic abuse are often reluctant to involve the police” (p. 199). Clare Woods’ death was the catalyst for legislation such as Bill 17 (Fieldberg, 2019; Russell, 2019). However, Clare Wood herself would not have benefited from the legislation that has been

created in her honor (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). She contacted the Manchester Police for “five months leading up to her death” to file complains about “harassment, threats to kill, sexual assault, and criminal damage” (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017, p. 286). Despite this, police failed to do anything about the alleged violence. Clare Wood was a woman who had awareness of her current relationship and recognized it was unsafe and unhealthy. As a response, she contacted the police and they ignored her pleas for help. Bill 17 would require individuals to contact police to gain information on their partner (Fieldberg, 2019; WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019; Russell, 2019). How can we have faith that police in any jurisdiction will respond adequately to calls *inquiring* about abuse when the police completely failed a woman who was currently being abused? Survivors of DV are often “hesitant to communicate” with police officers and police agencies (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017, p. 294; Griffith, 2014). Survivors’ hesitancy often stems from experiences with police and their failure to take action.

IPV survivors in Canada have mixed experiences with police and the judicial system. Most survivors reported police as being “somewhat helpful” in a close-ended questionnaire (Saxton et al., 2018, p. 8). Canadian survivors have stated that they feel supported when contacting police regarding DV. However, Saxton and colleagues (2018) attribute these findings to a potential “discrepancy ... due to low expectations that victims have regarding police responsiveness” (p.19). The authors state that many survivors reported feeling “lucky” for receiving an officer who cared; others also reported being persistent and requiring multiple officers at various times to receive one who was concerned. For some, persistence is impossible and results in “[giving] up simply from sheer exhaustion” (Saxton, Olszowy,

MacGregor, MacQuarrie, & Wathen, 2018, p. 11). With regards to the judicial process, survivors identified multiple inadequacies when handling DV calls (Saxton et al., 2018). The inadequacies ranged from protection orders to the judge and/or crown prosecutor that was appointed. Variations of treatment and experiences from police officers and the judicial system clearly identifies inconsistencies within DV training, as well as the understanding of the severity of these cases.

Further to the critiques outlined above, Bill 17 does not address police and judiciary responses to DV. Instead, it transfers the onus from the accused to the complainant. It also assumes the survivor is responsible for their abuse. A WINGS of Providence employee suggested that “police should not be allowed to refuse the release of information without explaining [why] to a guiding intersectional committee” (WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019). The intersectional committee suggested by the WINGS of Providence employee refers to a collaborative discussion between police, shelters (such as WINGS of Providence, WIN House, and Lurana Shelter in Edmonton), social workers and any other relevant professionals. She also suggested that the number of applications, length of time to receive a disclosure and the number of turned down applications should be monitored closely. These recommendations may help address the lack of accountability police agencies have.

Elizabeth Comack’s “Coming Back to Jail” (2018) reports the stories of forty-two women and their journeys through the cycle of victimization and criminalization. One story follows Carol, a woman who had an arranged marriage that manifested into a domestically violent relationship. Her story shines light on the injustices committed by police agencies against women fleeing domestic violence. Carol’s husband was a band constable on their

reserve. When she went to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to report the abuse, “they kind of just turned their back [on her]” and did not listen (Comack, 2018, p. 119). Police officers assured her that her husband “wouldn’t do that” and dismissed her fears and concerns (Comack, 2018, p. 119). After reporting her husband, Carol was arrested due to corruption within the police service and her husband’s employment with the RCMP. As a result, she stated that she would rather go to jail than have to stay with her husband. However, her husband who was “friends with the RCMP” wouldn’t allow that to happen and stated “[s]ee. I control you” (Comack, 2018, p. 119). It was not until sometime later that a family member outside of the reserve convinced her that she did not need to stay in the relationship. Carol’s aunt, an informal supporter, helped her out of the domestic relationship when the police failed to do so.

I argue that rather than solely focusing on Bill 17, the Provincial Government should enforce training for both police officers and judicial system employees to help reduce the incidences of IPV. The mandated training would likely spark an increase in reported rates of DV but would be beneficial in the long term, allowing formal supporters such as the police to step in. The Provincial Government’s proposal of Bill 17 does not address the past failures and lack of training by police forces and court systems. Unfortunately, the existence of Bill 17 would not have helped Carol who was suffering from DV because the police aligned with her abuser, regardless of what Carol said. Sadly, the police dismissed and shamed her instead. If women are supposed to contact police in order to receive support and assistance regarding their relationship, there must be consistency in treatment among the agencies. If women experience difficulty reporting the actual violence, women may have a more difficult time requesting disclosure of their partner's past actions.

Disclosure schemes, such as Bill 17, continue to fail women due to lack of police attention and urgency regarding DV (Comack, 2018; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Saxton et al, 2018). Bill 17 must also address the responsibilities of police officers. Before providing women with the opportunity to inquire about their partner, it is imperative that police are held accountable for their (in)actions and current responses towards DV. We expect individuals, mainly women, to feel comfortable contacting police about personal relationships even though these agencies have continually failed them. As mentioned above, the reported rate of DV in Alberta failed to include an estimated 70% of alleged offences (Statistics Canada, 2016). The relationships that women have with police officers influence reporting rates and this issue must be addressed before legislation such as Bill 17 is implemented.

Victim Blaming

Another factor that problematizes Bill 17 is the notion of victim blaming (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). Victim blaming “occurs when the victim(s) of a crime or accident is held responsible – in whole or in part – for the crimes that have been committed against them” (The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes, 2009). Women who experience DV may be victim-blamed because of internal attribution error. Internal attribution error refers to people that will judge the survivor because of personal characteristics and fail to recognize the environmental factors at play. In regards to disclosure schemes, this means that people may blame survivors for knowing about the violent history of their partners, yet choosing to stay with them anyways (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017).

Bill 17 assumes that after an individual is aware of their partner’s domestic history, they will be able to leave. It also suggests that they will *want* to leave. However, that is not

always the case. There are various reasons as to why women do not flee from DV (Dufty & Hardacre, 2005). Some reasons women stay include fear of speaking about the violence, consideration of children, or a belief that she can prevent the violence by obeying his orders. Another barrier experienced when leaving a violent relationship is the limited number of social services and shelters available (Dufty & Hardacre, 2005; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Taylor, 2019). The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes (2017) indicated that women often experience victim blaming when in violent relationships. They found that these women are often asked questions such as “why didn’t you just leave?” These questions assume that survivors are at fault for not leaving when the circumstances of the relationship are much more complex; individuals who ask these questions attempt to simplify a complicated scenario. Leaving an abusive relationship is not an easy feat. In addition, it blames the woman for remaining in the relationship and does not fault the partner who is abusing her. Victim blaming also ignores the fact that abuse can intensify when one attempts to leave the relationship. DV can continue after a survivor leaves a relationship. When analyzing the actual number of women killed by their partner per year, more women die from their current partner when compared to women who legally leave the relationship (Statistics Canada, 2015). However, women who have legally separated from their spouse are at a greater *risk* of being killed by their ex-partner. The risk for these women is six times higher than women who remain in their violent relationship. The heightened risk of death is another reason why women do not simply leave their abusive relationships.

For women who want to leave violent relationships, Clare’s Law (Bill 17) fails to acknowledge the considerable barriers women experience when attempting to leave, such as the lack of women’s shelters available (Dufty

& Hardacre, 2005; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Taylor, 2019). Victim blaming also influences future reporting rates of DV (The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes, 2009). If a woman speaks out about her violent relationship and is shamed in the process, she will likely be hesitant to report future abuse. Victim blaming also makes it difficult to leave because women feel isolated and as if no one believes them; they feel that they deserve the abuse—when they should not. These factors become exacerbated when dealing with marginalized populations such as Indigenous women (Comack, 2018; The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes, 2009). Indigenous women suffer from serious forms of DV and are less likely to report violence when compared to non-Indigenous survivors (Comack, 2018). Disclosure schemes require individuals to report abuse in order to serve their purpose. To this end, I argue that the legislation, Bill 17, may actually cause more harm than good for women in Alberta who experience DV due to fears of victim blaming.

Recommendations

Clare's Law has been criticized by academics, support services, and survivors of DV (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019; Taylor, 2019). Researchers suggest improving existing social services (e.g., access to shelters) over enacting brand-new legislation. One of the greatest barriers female survivors of DV encounter is a lack of adequate resources helping them escape the violence (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; Taylor, 2019). The construction of an intersectional committee recommended by the WINGS of Providence employee would assist in creation, reformation and implementation of DV legislation (WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019). Minister Rajan Swahney stated in a recent

news press release that the government will collaborate with external agencies and parties to ensure the effectiveness of the Bill 17 (Russell, 2019). Despite this, women's shelters were not listed as collaborative members, although the WINGS of Providence employee recommends otherwise (WINGS of Providence, personal communication, November 1). Women's shelters, such as WINGS of Providence, assist women and children fleeing domestic violence and are well versed in their needs for survival. They could provide the government with insight on the needs of these women and what supports or services could influence the prevalence of DV in Alberta.

Conclusion

Premier Jason Kenney has proposed Bill 17 (Clare's Law) as a response to extreme rates of DV in Alberta (Russell, 2019; Fieldberg, 2019). This law will provide individuals with the 'right to ask' and the 'right to know.' It has been suggested that enactment of this legislation will empower survivors and allow insight on the past of one's partner. However, there is limited research on the overall effectiveness of the legislation (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017; WINGS of Providence employee, personal communication, November 1, 2019; Taylor, 2019). In addition, the proposed legislation fails to address the overrepresentation of women and Indigenous peoples who comprise the majority of DV survivors in Canada (Brownridge, 2008; Comack, 2018, Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2019; Wuerch et al., 2019). Alberta's adoption of Clare's Law places a great deal of trust in judicial systems and police agencies that routinely fail DV survivors; police agencies and judicial systems continue to neglect the severity of domestically violent relationships and have frequently favour the abuser. Furthermore, Bill 17 may have unintended consequences on survivors of DV because

women may be shamed for remaining in the violent relationship. Unfortunately, the Bill does not address or acknowledge the various reasons why women choose to remain in violent relationships. Bill 17 also transfers onus and responsibility from perpetrator to survivor. Lastly, this legislation does not address the women who comprise the majority of survivors; Indigenous women experience the greatest rates of DV and there are numerous factors that perpetuate the violence. Alberta should transfer their efforts to reforming police guidelines to DV and social services for women fleeing violence, instead of creating Bill 17. Lastly, Albertans must advocate for deep, radical, systematic changes within our society that currently encourages and perpetuates male violence against women.

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