

Book review

**Intimate Violence
Across the Lifespan:
Interpersonal,
Familial and Cross
Generational
Perspectives**

**By Tova Band-Winterstein and
Eisikovits Zvi
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This volume, the result of 12 years of work, contributes to the growing research literature on understanding dimensions of elder abuse across countries. But it also provides a much needed extra dimension. It provides an additional emphasis, generally missing in emerging studies, that of describing within intimate violence the situation of aging partners and adult children, who besides the victims of abuse and violence are part of the dynamics of interpersonal and cross-generational relationships. Intimate partner violence, or domestic abuse, is still a field not properly understood in terms of its causes, forms, incidence and prevalence rates, prevention and management, yet it persists in all societies and is replicated across generations. The book makes useful contribution through a phenomenological approach with extensive use of interview data in discussing the occurrence of violence in families by abusers and impact on victims as they age. It notes how intimate violence among adults affects children and their later lives as adults in the roles of married partner and as a parent. The authors portray intimate partner violence as a process rather than as a one off static occurrence. The strength of the book also lies in providing information on interventions that help victims deal with their lives, build resilience, manage relationships, and survival. Reading this volume would be beneficial to researchers, clinicians, and other professionals across disciplines.

The Foreword, by Simon Biggs, rightly puts the book in the context of an ageing world where soon the number of older people will be of the same proportion as the young and where older adults may be at greater risk of violence and abuse because of the population size and the changing dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Understanding of families and intimate relationships requires more ground-breaking research as we notice increasing intergenerational conflict yet at the same time more solidarity within families and between family members as people age and often face situations when the two coexist in providing different facets to relationships at different points of time. Tova Band-Winterstein and Zvi Eisikovits with their primary research conducted with battered women, battering men, their adult children who grew up in violence and with older couples and individuals who aged in violence, provide evidence of how people live and deal with violence. As people age, a new set of strategies may come into play which are depicted in this volume as coping mechanisms and which reveal the dynamics of relationships between the victims and the perpetrators of intimate violence in later life.

With its emphasis on empirical and theoretical orientations, the book provides a world view with cross-generational perspectives necessary for understanding the persisting and growing incidence of intimate violence and domestic abuse across the lifespan. Old age brings with it certain specific aspects of intimate partner violence, which have been described in the book and concern is appropriately in the context of the “self, couplehood, parenthood and intergenerational relations” (p. 3). As pointed out in various chapters older women use various strategies to build a life-long adaptive process to perpetuate the relationship with the partner and children and these are shaped by age, norms and various

biosocial and cultural limitations as well as interpreted by their personal history and role transitions over life. The focus on time dimensions, which is seldom examined in studies and literature on intimate violence, is an important contribution of the book to our understanding about elder abuse.

Chapters, "Living in an as-if reality", "Carrying the burden for a lifetime", "Giving meaning to life in violence", and "The family we-ness in the shadow of long term violence", are all based on interviews with family units with both perpetrators and victims and their adult children and depict various situations for understanding violence across the life span. Many times, violence is covered up to create family harmony, other times it is reflected as deviant, but in general violence prevents family members from being true to themselves and to each other. Often then intimate partner violence becomes taken for granted and outside intervention, support or help is avoided. Further, intimate partner violence leads to destruction of family life with each family member searching for meaning of their life. This living in a meaningless world over time compels family members to find new meaning for their life within violence. The new insights "are rooted in the development of functional versions of joint life for the elderly couple, such as return to religious roots, the achievement of freedom as revenge against the other, and the renaissance of personal identity" (p. 77). On the other hand, the children either disconnect from cross-generational transmission of violence or express it in different forms. As family members age they are also affected by dimensions of caregiving, which "raises many ethical dilemmas at various levels" (p. 93) as violence creates a field in

which living in violence continues to be experienced long after violent behaviour comes to an end.

The last chapter of this worthwhile book discusses interventions and clearly takes the stand that interventions with families that have aged in violence should be targeted at the family as a whole. The chapter suggests as an interventional strategy the need to make relationships tolerable, enhance the self-worth of the victims, and consider forgiveness and reconciliation as people approach the end of their lives. Therapists dealing with victims and perpetrators of intimate violence must attempt to infuse renewed meaning in relationships, facilitating "enjoyment, growth and change" (p. 121). The authors suggest life review as a therapeutic method for victimized older women as it can enable healing by viewing where they can and cannot compromise. It helps to balance positive and negative events and experiences and provides a source of increased resilience. A life review approach is also seen as an opportunity for perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence as it allows men to consider alternative means to aggression in relationships. The authors point out that for adult children reflections on their life and that of their parents can help to bring a focus on how to stop intergenerational transmission of violence. The authors of the book adopt a normative perspective which does have its shortcomings and another book may be needed to challenge this normative view.

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