# Chapter 11

## Stress, Conflict, and Abuse Across the Life Course

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the differing explanations for family stress and dysfunction.
2. Describe the ABC-X and Circumplex models of family functioning as well as their historical roots in the work of Reuben Hill.
3. Understand the ways in which family stress and conflict play out at different stages across the family life course.
4. Discuss less well-known expressions of family stress conflict and abuse such as sibling violence, adolescent–parent abuse, and elder neglect, as well as date rape, spousal abuse, and corporal punishment.
5. Outline the research supporting the intergenerational transfer of dysfunctional family behaviour.

Even through the walls, they could hear the screaming and the crying. Bob and Jan had their own financial challenges, but ever since their neighbour Kwan had lost his job, he and Juanita had been fighting more than usual. It probably didn't help thatthat the twins had been demanding most of Juanita energy and attention; Having four children under 4 years of age must be pretty taxing for Kwan and Juanita. But this time seemed worse, and the crying was not from the kids but from Juanita. It soundedlike cries of pain rather than of frustration.

Jan recognized the sound. She had been involved in an abusive relationship prior to Bob and the slow constriction of her freedom and the isolation from her family ultimately led to a situation ripe for her partner's violent outbursts, which she hates to admit were preferable to the degrading names he would call her.

As the sound of the sirens began to get louder, Bob and Jan figured that someone must have called the police. They guessed that it probably had been Mrs. Chan, who lived in the apartment on the other side of Kwan and Juanita. They knew she was home because she had just gotten back from hospital. Her arm was in a cast and her adult son who accompanied her had said she'd had a fall. Mrs. Chan hadn't seemed to hear him and must have been in a rush, because she hadn't even looked up or attempted to make eye contact.

The family is held up as the basic building block of society, a place where intimacy is encouraged and where children are nurtured. So why is it that the family is also a place where stress is prevalent, conflict seems to be the norm, and abuse in its most hideous forms can be found? The **universal taboo** is not neglecting your children, but sexually abusing them. In addition to incest, there are the controversial topics of abortion and infanticide, both of which have been practised by the family across cultures and throughout history. Homicide also often has family connections (Figure 11.1). Current research shows that the family members most likely to be killed are younger children, particularly those under 1 year of age (Cavanagh, Dobash, & Dobash, 2007). Gender is not a factor, as boys and girls are equally likely to be victims of fatal child abuse. The act is mostly likely to take place in the home and occurs more often when the child is in the solitary or temporary care of a parent, typically a father or stepfather. Direct blows and physical force often take the life of younger children, with shaking widely reported as a cause of infant deaths.

This chapter looks across the life course at the common family issues of stress and conflict as well as the less frequent but too often present issues of abuse and violence. After a brief overview of social science's explanation of extreme family dysfunction, we discuss a few relevant research models used to understand how some families deal more effectively than others with the challenges of family functioning. The last section in this


**Note(s):** Rate per 1,000,000 legally married, common-law, separated and divorced spouses, 15 years of age and over, based on estimates provided by Demography Division, Statistics Canada. Spousal homicides reported by police include a small number of victims who were separated from a common-law relationship. As population estimates are unavailable for this sub-population, the overall rates of spousal homicide may be slightly overestimated. Same-sex partners were excluded from the analysis due to the unavailability of population estimates. Homicides of same-sex partners represented 1% of spousal homicides.

**Figure 11.1** Spousal Homicide Rates Highest Among Young Female Spouses, 1998 to 2007

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2009000/ct014-eng.htm

chapter presents a systematic approach to stress, conflict, and abuse across various stages of the life course, beginning with the formation of intimate relationships and concluding with the topic of elder abuse.

## ORIGINS AND EXPLANATIONS OF HARMFUL DYSFUNCTION

The explanations for why something so good can become something so bad are numerous. We provide a brief overview of four of these explanations: sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, psychological explanations, sociological explanations at both the macro and the micro level, and family theory explanations.

### Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

Sociobiology is concerned with examining the combination of sociological and biological factors to explain human behaviour. At its core, this approach applies the Darwinian

theory of evolution to explain the motivation behind social conduct. Genetic evolutionists believe that certain human behaviours exist as the result of weeding out poor adaptive social patterns over the course of human history. At the heart of sociobiology and the closely related discipline of evolutionary psychology is the **nature verses nurture** debate. How much of what we do in our individual and social lives is the result of being socialized (nurture) to behave in a certain way, and how much of it is the result of genetic qualities that we have inherited from our parents (nature)? Evolutionary psychology attempts to minimize the controversy associated with sociobiology once the discipline moved from explaining animal survival behaviour to explaining human social behaviour.

Central to a discussion of the dysfunctional aspects of the family are sociobiology's explanations for the negative social behaviours closely related to intimate relationships and family life, such as lying, jealousy, rape, violent acts, infidelity, and murder. This theoretical approach would describe these acts as successful adaptive strategies for survival that improve reproduction opportunities. Murder becomes an adaptive strategy because it can be employed to eliminate threats from rivals, which may include non-genetic relatives such as stepchildren. Genetic fitness would be encouraged by murdering deformed infants, the infirm, or the chronically ill. Infanticide may be practised to ensure that male (rather than female) offspring survive to adulthood or because of contested resources such as available food sources, land, or inheritance rights. Rape may be practised by those who are less sexually desirable to improve their reproductive chances.

David Buss, an evolutionary psychologist, developed a theory regarding sexual mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; see Figure 11.2) that views men and women as differing in terms of the quest for short-term mates and long-term mates. Both sexes are motivated by the desire to perpetuate themselves through offspring. Their strategies are socially developed to increase the probability of raising as many healthy offspring to adulthood as possible. Males are more concerned with short-term strategies than are women, but both must

**Short-term reproductive challenges**

| Men | Women |
|---|---|
| Partner number | Immediate resource extraction |
| Identify sexually accessible women | Judge as possible long-term mates |
| Minimizing cost, risk & commitment | Get high quality genes |
| Identify fertile women | Cultivate back-up mates |

**Long-term reproductive challenges**

| Men | Women |
|---|---|
| Paternity confidence | Identify men willing to invest |
| Assess woman's reproductive value | Physical protection |
| Identify women w/ + parenting skills | Identify men who will commit |
| Get woman with high quality genes | Identify men w/ + parenting skills & + genes |

**Figure 11.2** Short-Term and Long-Term Reproductive Challenges

come to consensus in order to survive. These differing strategies create conflict between the sexes and foster other negative aspects of relationships in differing magnitude. Conflict occurs as men and women disagree on the timing of the onset of sex as well as on the frequency of sex and partner exclusivity regarding sex. These conflicts are accompanied by

jealousy, infidelity, and a cadre of psychologically and physically abusive behaviours. Men are more likely to be jealous of their partners' sexual infidelity than their emotional infidelity, whereas women demonstrate the opposite pattern. According to sociobiologists, "The ultimate function of male jealousy is to increase the probability that one's wife will conceive one's own rather than someone else's child" (Symons, 1979, p. 242).

## Psychological Explanations

Several authors have looked at psychological explanations for violent behaviour in intimate relationships. Dutton (2010) has identified borderline personality organization (BPO) as one explanation. He describes the person with BPO as having an unstable sense of self, uncomfortable being alone, suffering from abandonment anxiety, having intense anger, being demanding and impulsive, and usually connected to substance abuse and promiscuity. This combination leads to inevitable instability in interpersonal relationships and often undermines the success of any close relationships (Box 11.1). The abusive personality has been an area of study by social scientists only for the past 40 years. The *Journal of Marriage and Family*, the dominant journal in the study of family intimacy, contained no reference to violence between 1939 and 1969 (Dutton, 2007). Researchers must have deluded themselves into thinking that marriage may contain conflict but not violence. It is clearly understood now that this is not the case.

Box 11.1

### University of British Columbia Rallies Behind Attacked Grad Student

A horrific attack on a University of British Columbia graduate student, home visiting her family in Bangladesh, has led to renewed discussion at the university of defending the right of women to an education. *The Globe and Mail* reported that the husband of Rumana Monzur, a graduate student in political science at British Columbia and an assistant professor at Dhaka University, has been charged with gouging out her eyes, leaving her blind. While Monzur was planning to return to Vancouver to defend her thesis, her husband reportedly opposed the idea of her leaving the country.

Stephen J. Toope, then president at British Columbia, sent a letter to students and faculty members in which he said: "This tragic occasion is a poignant marker of the need to work to protect the fundamental human right of all women to pursue education. The allegations that her commitmentto her studies was a factor in the attack are of grave concern."

Source: http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/06/24/qt

Other researchers have demonstrated that not all abusive personalities should be equated (Johnson, 2008; O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994). These authors view the motivations for lower-level partner violence as being distinct from those influencing men who commit severe abuse. O'Leary et al. (1994) point to mildly abusive men having greater tendencies toward impulsiveness, suspicion of others, and aggressive tendencies, but state that those who commit extremely violent acts usually are diagnosed with one of several psychological disorders such as schizophrenia or severe narcissism. Johnson's (2008) work looks at two distinct categories of interpersonal violence. **Situational couple violence** is distinct from the more severe category of **intimate terrorism** in that it tends to be less severe and more mutual. In one Canadian study using data from General Social Survey 2004, independent research found that those categorized as being in the situational violence group had an 8 percent frequency score for ongoing violence and that 9 percent of the victims feared for their lives. This contrasts with 57 percent and 60 percent, respectively, for those categorized as being in the more severe violence group (Ansara & Hindin, 2009).

## Sociological Explanations

**Macro Explanations** Macro sociological explanations for harmful family behaviour focus on the institutional level of analysis. What are the prevailing ideologies regarding violence, how violent is the society in which we live, and what punishments or sanctions are connected with different forms of violence? This approach argues that societal factors explain why families and members of families behave poorly toward one another. The culture of violence theory sees a general social acceptance of violence, leading to greater prevalence of violence in the family and among individuals. Greater exposure to violence through violent video games, television programming (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011), and sporting events (Sabo, Gray, & Moore, 2000) lowers the general consciousness in terms of what is considered a violent act.

The dominant sociological theory used to explain the negative side of the family is the feminist-inspired theory of patriarchy. A patriarchal society is one dominated by males. This domination spreads across all dimensions of society, from kinship structure, to inheritance rights, to social and political power, to family structure and functioning. According to this perspective, a society structured around male domination facilitates the abuse of power between men and women and leads to detrimental family behaviour. The power imbalance makes women vulnerable to men who seek to gain and maintain control and power through coercion and abusive behaviour (Yodanis, 2004). Feminist scholars are critical of psychological and sociobiological explanations because they believe that these explanations provide excuses for abusive male behaviour and do not address the root cause of how abusive behaviour is learned, encouraged, and permitted at the societal level.

**Micro Explanations** Micro sociological explanations of family dysfunction concentrate on what is going on in the life of the individual or in the lives of the couple. Exchange theory explains hurtful and harmful behaviours as goal-achieving activities that

outweigh the costs associated with those activities. If a husband receives no legal or social sanction for abusing his wife, he may continue the practice because it works in terms of him achieving dominance and control. If an elderly woman extends financial help to her adult son, conflict and potential abuse may be alleviated (Wallace & Roberson, 2010). Investment theory assumes that as an individual invests more in a relationship over a longer period, the harder it becomes to leave the relationship. This theory explains why happily married newlyweds may be less stable and at greater risk for divorce than older unhappy couples, who have a greater investment in the relationship (e.g., children, combined assets, social networks). With little investment in the relationship, the lack of barriers such as religious beliefs or children may make the newly married couple more susceptible to the pulls of alternative partners, who may appear to be a better option than the spouse. Becker (1991), a noted economic theorist who applied his research to family patterns, feels that individuals are constantly looking for new mates throughout the life course, even when they are married. As time goes on, the investment in a relationship increases and the alternatives for relationships decrease, leading to greater marital stability later in life.

## Family Theory Explanations

In addition to the explanations already discussed, theories regarding family dysfunction treat the family as a level of analysis and not simply as an aggregate of the individuals in the family. We highlight two of these theories here: **family development theory** and **family stress theory**. They share a similar intellectual background.

Family development theory has as its focus the systematic and patterned changes that families experience over the life course. Family development theory dates back to the late eighteenth century (Mattessich & Hill, 1987). However, it was Hill and Rodgers (1964) who presented the theory's basic tenets, which are used by current family scholars. Family development theory's important contribution to our discussion of the negative side of families is based on propositional statements regarding the consequences of family transitions, such as marriage and childbirth, being out of sequence or off-time from social norms. For example, a couple with children will experience considerably more stress if one of the partners decides to go back to school full-time rather than if that person's education had been completed before the formation of the union and the arrival of children. White and Klein (2008) list the following propositions of family development theory:

1. Family development is a group process regulated by societal norms and sequencing norms.
2. If a family or individual is out of sequence with the normative ordering of family events, the probability of later life disruptions is increased.
3. Within the family group, family members create internal family norms.
4. Interactions within the family group are regulated by the social norms constructing family roles.

5. Transitions from one family stage to another are predicted by the current stage and by the duration of time spent in that stage.
6. Individuals and families systematically deviate from institutional family norms to adjust their behaviour to other institutional norms, such as work and education.

Items 2 and 6 emphasize that there may be costs and rewards to the family for functioning in a certain way in a given social context. The costs can accumulate and create challenges that the family must try to address. The way in which the family handles these challenges may be beneficial or detrimental to the overall health of the family. These two outcomes provide a link to family stress theory, which we use to structure the rest of the chapter.

## STRESS, CONFLICT, AND ABUSE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

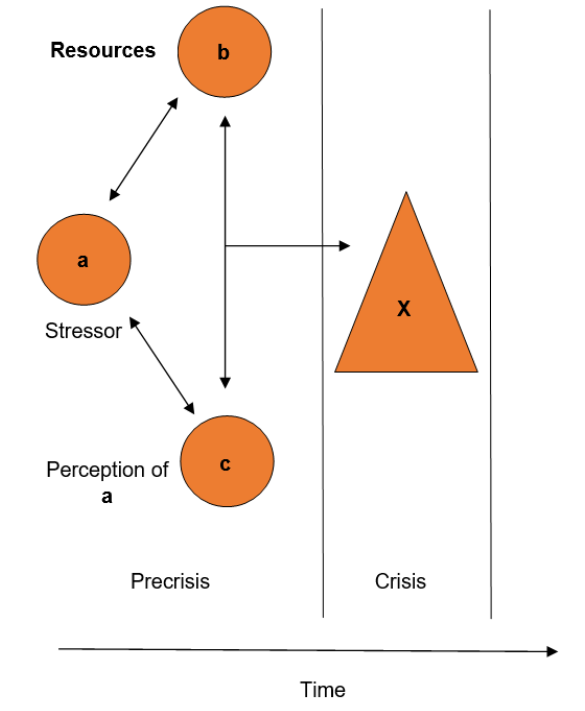
The negative side of family relationships takes many forms but whether the discussion is about the magnitude of the hurt or the severity of the pain, the negative behaviours begin when smaller, seemingly insignificant events are not dealt with in a constructive manner. Family stress theory builds around what Hill (1949) termed the **ABC-X model** and focuses on how families deal with stressors to the family system.

### Hill's ABC-X Model

Reuben Hill's (1949) study of role theory at the individual level of analysis was expanded to examine the role of stress at the family level. His work emphasizes systems and the importance of family development across the life course instead of simply looking at individual development. His construction of the ABC-X model used to understand family stress flows specifically from research on families' adjustment to the absence of fathers during World War II and their eventual return. Hill was concerned with identifying the factors found to mediate stress in those families. Hill defined *A* as the provoking event or stressor, *B* as the family's resources or strengths at the time of the event, and *C* as the meaning attached to the event by the family. In the ABC-X model, the *X* represents the stressor and crisis. Hill viewed stressors not as either positive or negative but as normative. Yet even in its neutrality, stress has the potential to initiate change in the system it affects. Hill and others (McCubbin, Sussman, & Patterson, 1983) continued to develop the ABC-X model as well as its longitudinal version called the **double ABC-X model** (Figure 11.3). In the double ABC-X model, time is introduced to capture both the multiple concurrent stressors that may be present in the family system and the stressors that may be occurring sequentially across the life course. Multiple crises happening at one time could include the birth of a child during a major housing relocation for work, or a job change that coincides with a child's illness.

The ABC-X model is frequently used in the study of family stress, conflict, and abuse. It has been shown to be relevant cross-culturally and was used by Lee (2009) to

**Figure 11.3** Long-Term and Short-Term Mating Strategies




study elder abuse among South Korean families. It also has been shown to be valuable in the study of racially diverse families with autistic children. Manning, Wainwright, and Bennett (2011) found that the model's focus on family adaptation helped to explain the variance in family functioning and parental distress. Reconstituted families (Greeff & Du Toit, 2009) and military families (Westhuis, Fafara, & Ouellette, 2006) have also been researched using this model. Family therapists are often guided by this theory in assisting families going through crisis (Mendenhall & Berge, 2010).

## Circumplex Model

The existence of stress and conflict in family life does not mean that abuse must take place. The proper handling of stress and crisis can actually strengthen a family and help its intimacy to grow. Before moving on to examples of stress and abuse across the life course, we briefly look at one popular model for dealing with the challenges that family life sends our way.

The **circumplex model** was developed by David Olson and built on the interaction of three empirically identified important dimensions of family functioning: cohesion, flexibility, and communication (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). Cohesion refers to the amount of physical and, more importantly, emotional connectedness that a family experiences. Five categories range from *overly disconnected* to *overly connected*, with *balanced* in the centre. Flexibility is a measure of the family's level of comfort with role rigidity— for example, a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. The five categories for this dimension range from

*overly flexible* to *inflexible*. The communication dimension is overlaid on the intersection of the cohesion and flexibility dimensions and assesses the quality and health of family communication, especially in the areas of problem solving and conflict resolution.

The circumplex model has been used to examine a number of family function areas, such as marriage preparation and enhancement, and as a predictive tool for couples at heightened risk for divorce. It has been used in more than 500 research studies and has been validated cross-culturally and with a variety of different family forms (see www.prepare-enrich.com and www.facesiv.com/home.html for further information on these studies and data). The model is dynamic in that it is useful in tracking couple and family units across time, whether through different stages of life or through the challenges of a particularly stressful event, such as the loss of a loved one or the birth of a child (see Career Box 11.1). The goal ofthe healthy, well-functioning family is not to aim for the middle of the diagram, but to

**Career Box 11.1**

## Finding Your Place on the Couple Map

When Carla met Troy on an online dating site, she was ecstatic. They seemed to be compatible in almost every aspect of life. When they finally met in person, Carla was convinced that Troy was the one for her.

As the relationship progressed, the couple found themselves in a marriage preparation class run by a local certified family life educator. During one class, Carla and Troy were asked a variety of questions that would help the counsellor determine the type of family they both came from and how they viewed their own relationship as a couple. Carla was surprised when she saw that her impression of the relationship on the couple map (circumplex model) was quite different from Troy's. She thought that they were quite balanced but he thought that they were overly connected and very inflexible. Troy documented that he came from a family that was chaotic and disengaged. Carla's family was enmeshed and rigid.

What concerned Carla most was that Troy was happy with the type of family he came from and used the class as an opportunity to tell Carla that he was concerned about her tendencies toward controlling him and not giving him his freedom. Troy liked to live week to week with his paycheques and Carla was a meticulous budgeter. Was truelove.com just another dead end in Carla's pursuit of a soul mate, or was the mapping exercise revealing something they could work on to make their relationship stronger? As each of them reflected on the exercise, the question of whether this was the person the other wanted to build a life with came to the forefront.

understand that different stages of life and of an individual crisis will necessitate movement around the diagram. After a crisis, a flexibly connected family may become chaotically enmeshed as they initially deal with the event. As the family members work through the crisis together, they may move into the rigidly connected category before moving back into one of the balanced inner quadrants. A family's movement across the life course may see newlyweds being more enmeshed than a retired couple and parents being more flexible with teenage children than they were when their children were young.

## THE FAMILY ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

We now turn our attention to the family life course to discuss a sampling of the negative side of families across time. We begin with the relationship formation stage and then move through cohabitation, newly married couples, parenting, and the empty nest period. This is the traditional pathway through life, but family life courses today are quite diverse and the challenges they face may not be so neat and are likely to change over time.

### Relationship Formation

The transition to adulthood is defined differently in different cultures and across time, but one universal benchmark is the development of an intimate relationship leading to

family formation. According to Arnett (2000), partnering is one of three primary tasks for emerging adults. Other researchers reinforce this idea: "Learning how to form, maintain,

and gracefully end romantic and sexual relationships with others is arguably one of the critical developmental tasks of adolescence and early adulthood" (Snyder, 2006, p. 161). It can be expected some individuals will negotiate this task with less grace than others. The implications of this lack of grace may range from embarrassment and discomfort to conflict and abuse. Along the road to mastery of navigating oneself into and out of romantic relationships, a few bumps will certainly be encountered.

**Jealousy** William Shakespeare called jealousy the green-eyed monster, research shows that it is a key factor in 80 percent of spousal homicides (Wilson & Daly, 1998), and others argue that jealousy has no boundaries and that it penetrates all social positions, intellectual levels, ages, races, and economic strata. Jealousy has been demonstrated to be a precursor to interpersonal violent acts (Babcock, Costa, Green, & Eckhardt, 2004). It is certainly a poignant illustration of the negative side of families, specifically concerning mate selection and relationship formation. Jealousy is an emotional reaction to a perceived threat to an existing relationship. Typically, it is invoked when a third person is attracted to one of the partners. Although jealousy may be a part of all stages of relationships and family life, it is most often a factor in developing relationships where commitment and security may be fragile.

White and Mullen (1989) define jealousy as coming in two flavours: **chronic jealousy** and **relationship jealousy**. The former is more of a character trait, while the latter is situational and predicated on the condition of the relationship.

> Romantic jealousy is a complex of thoughts, emotions, and actions that follows loss of or threat to self-esteem and/or the existence or quality of the romantic relationship. The perceived loss or threat is generated by the perception of a real or potential romantic attraction between one's partner and a (perhaps imaginary) rival. (White & Mullen, 1989, p. 9)

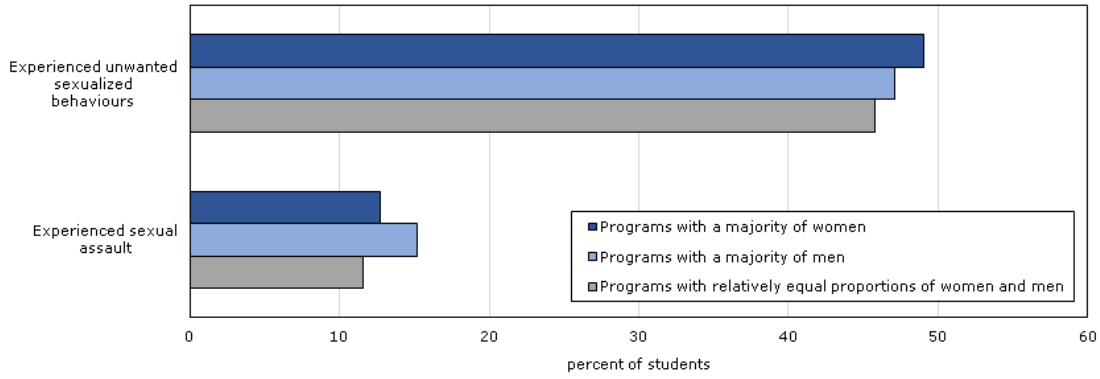
**Fatal Attraction** Hollywood may have made the expression *fatal attraction* more popular through highly sexualized imagery, but it usually manifests itself in more pedestrian ways. Fatal attraction, in the sense of foreshadowing rather than being deadly, occurs when someone is attracted to a certain quality or characteristic in his or her partner that ends up being a major irritant. For example, a person may consider his partner`s spontaneity an attractive quality, only to later describe that same characteristic as irresponsible and undisciplined. Women have a slightly higher proclivity to fatal attraction, and personality characteristics rather than physical characteristics tend to be more prevalent (Femlee, 1998). The idea that opposites attract (Winch, 1955) does not find support in the literature. Fatal attraction is much more likely to occur between people who do not share a certain characteristic. Femlee (1998) concludes that although opposites may attract initially, that attraction sows the seeds of eventual repulsion and the dissolution of the relationship. The intriguing aspect of this dark element of relationship formation is that when the relationship dissolves, increased conflict and emotional strain occur over a quality that was evident at the beginning of the relationship rather than something that occurred during the relationship itself. With this knowledge, one questions how a pleasing attribute could become so detestable and why it is not recognized as such earlier in the relationship formation process.

**Date Rape and Sexual Coercion** The formation of intimate relationships, a precursor to a committed relationship, must negotiate the timeline and degree of physical and emotional intercourse. Canadian data show that more than 80 percent of those 20- to 24-years-old have engaged in sexual intercourse at least once (Statistics Canada, 2005b). Other research in North America shows that among those aged 20 to 24 years, males have

a higher average number of partners (3.8) than females (2.8). Men in this age group are also more likely (30 percent) than women (21 percent) to report having had seven or more sexual partners. Ten percent of young women aged 18 to 24 years who have had sexual intercourse before age 20 report that their first intercourse was involuntary. The younger they were at first intercourse, the higher the proportion reporting it as involuntary. A study of date rape victims in the Vancouver area (McGregor et al., 2004) showed an increasing trend in the percentage of victims who report the administration of an unsuspected drug during the assault (Table 11.1). Regardless of whether sexual coercion is physical or non-physical, women who have been sexually coerced by an intimate partner experience negative physical and psychological consequences (e.g., Campbell & Alford, 1989; Campbell & Soeken, 1999).

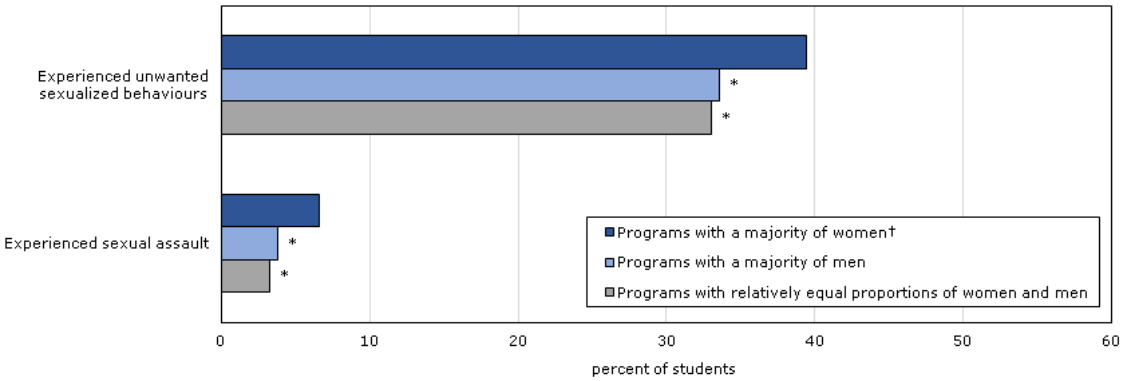
**Violence** Research on the health effects of dating violence among college students (DuRant et al., 2007) summarizes the prevalence of dating violence and its resultant health implications. The students themselves describe it as significant health problem. Data cited

**Figure 11.4** Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Unwanted Sexualized Behaviours among Women Studying at Canadian Postsecondary Schools in the Past 12 Months, by Gender Composition of Program of Study, 2019




**Note:** Differences are not statistically significant. Includes university students only. Includes students aged 18 to 24 (17 to 24 in Quebec) as of December 31, 2018 in the Canadian provinces. The categories "women" and "men" include cisgender and transgender women and men. Percent calculations are based on unrounded estimates and include missing responses. Includes incidents that happened in a postsecondary school setting, including on campus, off campus (if they occurred during travel to or from school, during an official or unofficial event organized by someone affiliated with the school, or during paid or unpaid employment, work placements or volunteer work associated with postsecondary studies) or online (where some or all of the people responsible were students, teachers or other people associated with the school). Programs where women or men represent 60% or more of students (according to data from the 2016/2017 academic year collected by the Postsecondary Student Information System) are considered to be programs in which women or men (respectively) form the majority of students. Confidence intervals are available upon request.
**Source:** Survey of Individual Safety in the Postsecondary Student Population.

**Figure 11.5** Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Unwanted Sexualized Behaviours among Men Studying at Canadian Postsecondary Schools in the Past 12 Months, by Gender Composition of Program of Study, 2019




* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)
† reference category
**Note:** Includes university students only. Includes students aged 18 to 24 (17 to 24 in Quebec) as of December 31, 2018 in the Canadian provinces. The categories "women" and "men" include cisgender and transgender women and men. Percent calculations are based on unrounded estimates and include missing responses. Includes incidents that happened in a postsecondary school setting, including on campus, off campus (if they occurred during travel to or from school, during an official or unofficial event organized by someone affiliated with the school, or during paid or unpaid employment, work placements or volunteer work associated with postsecondary studies) or online (where some or all of the people responsible were students, teachers or other people associated with the school). Programs where women or men represent 60% or more of students (according to data from the 2016/2017 academic year collected by the Postsecondary Student Information System) are considered to be programs in which women or men (respectively) form the majority of students. Confidence intervals are available upon request.
**Source:** Survey of Individual Safety in the Postsecondary Student Population.

**Table 11.1** Summary of Hospital-reported Sexual Assault and Drug-facilitated Sexual Assault (DFSA) for Vancouver and Surrounding Communities, January 1993-May 2002*

| Year of Assault | Total # of Sexual Assaults | # of DFSAs | Proportion of DFSAs (%) Among Total Sexual Assaults |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 186 | 17 | 9.1 |
| 1994 | 147 | 12 | 8.2 |
| 1995 | 130 | 8 | 6.2 |
| 1996 | 164 | 14 | 8.5 |
| 1997 | 165 | 17 | 10.3 |
| 1998 | 162 | 16 | 9.9 |
| 1999 | 208 | 45 | 21.6 |
| 2000 | 156 | 40 | 25.6 |
| 2001 | 180 | 51 | 28.3 |
| 2002 (Jan-May)† | 90 | 26 | 27.1 |

* Excludes individuals presenting to the SAS who resided outside the SAS catchment area (Vancouver, Richmond, North Shore, Howe Sound)

† Data only available to May 31, 2002

Source: McGregor et al. (2004, p. 442).

show that the percentage of those in grades 6 through 12 who have engaged in dating violence ranges from 7 percent to 51 percent for both victim and perpetrator. DuRant and colleagues (2007) explain the wide variance in percentages as being due to the diverse nature of the samples and the lack of clarity regarding the definition of dating violence. Studies defined dating violence as ranging from verbal threats and intimidation to physical fighting or other forms of violence; however, DuRant and colleagues feel that the consensus among researchers is that adolescents may underreport dating violence. They conclude from their representative sample of 3900 college students that "among men, date fight victimization was associated with early onset of alcohol consumption, current tobacco and amphetamine use, and recent threats of physical violence. Female victims of date fighting were more likely to have been the victim of other violence, to have had multiple sex partners, to have had a history of heavy alcohol consumption, and to have used illegal drugs" (DuRant et al., 2007, p. 295). DuRant and colleagues' findings are not consistent with previous research that suggested that women were more likely than men to suffer the negative effects of violence from an intimate partner. Foshee (1996), using a broader definition of dating violence that included threatening communication, verbal abuse, and sexual victimization, found that 39.4 percent of younger adolescent males and 36.5 percent of younger adolescent females had been a victim of dating violence at least once, and that 15.0 percent of men and 27.8 percent of women reported perpetrating dating violence.

Burnette (2016) specifically looked at intimate partner violence (IPV) in Indigenous families. She found that most participants linked the increased risk factors for IPV the historical oppression of Indigenous people. Risk factors in the Indigenous sample were generally similar to those in the

non-Indigenous population, namely lack of affection, intergenerational patterns of abuse, and partner substance abuse and unemployment. Family division was also a prominent dynamic within Indigenous families affected by violence, which participants largely attributed to a tendency to keep problems secret. This tendency toward secrecy was also attributed to coping with historical oppression, as privacy may have been linked to survival.

Box 11.2

## Domestic Abuse in the LGBTQ+ Community

Most research on abuse focuses on heterosexual relationships, but these are not the only relationships in which abuse can happen. Due to society's tendency to dismiss same-gender relationships, abuse in those relationships has largely been ignored by researchers. In a 2017 study, Lorenzetti and colleagues sought out to better understand risk factors for domestic abuse in same-gender relationships. They found the following risk factors:

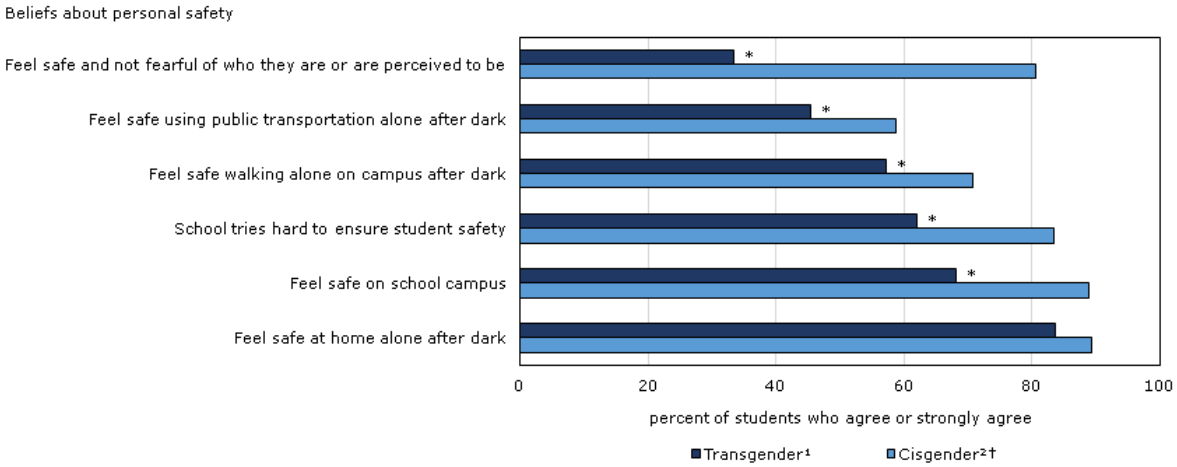
- Heterosexism and sexual stigma: the marginalization of LGBTQ people can contribute to an abuser's self-hatred, which they then transfer onto their partner.
- Traditional gender and sexuality norms: higher levels of gender-nonconformity are associated with higher levels of abuse, harassment, and mental distress
- Social exclusion and isolation through the lifespan: social exclusion can spread through family, community, and social institutions and is associated with an increased risk of domestic violence.
- Lack of safe, accessible and appropriate domestic violence prevention services and supports: Lack of shelters, training to deliver services for LGBTQ victims of domestic violence, bias and discrimination from staff can all deter LGBTQ victim of domestic violence to seek assistance.

A study conducted by Ristock and colleagues (2019) also found that 43 of the 50 Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Indigenous participants had experienced domestic violence. The risk factors for domestic violence were traced to similar sources to the ones found by Lorenzetti and colleagues (2017), with the added risk factor of the context of colonization as a form of normalized violence.

Sources: Lorenzetti, L., Wells, L., Logie, C. H., & Callaghan, T. (2017). Understanding and preventing domestic violence in the lives of gender and sexually diverse persons. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *26*(3), 175-185.

Ristock, J., Zoccole, A., Passante, L., & Potskin, J. (2019). Impacts of colonization on Indigenous Two-Spirit/LGBTQ Canadians' experiences of migration, mobility and relationship violence. *Sexualities*, *22*(5-6), 767-784.

**Figure 11.5** Students at Canadian Postsecondary Schools' Beliefs about Personal Safety, by Transgender Status, 2019




* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)
† reference category
1. Includes people who identify with a gender other than the one that they were assigned at birth, including individuals who do not identify with either of the binary genders, who identify with both binary genders, or who identify with a binary gender in addition to another gender.
2. Includes people who identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth.
**Note:** Includes postsecondary students aged 18 to 24 (17 to 24 in Quebec) in the Canadian provinces. Percent calculations are based on unrounded estimates and include missing responses. Respondents were able to provide information on multiple incidents; therefore, percentages do not add to 100. Students who indicated that a particular situation did not apply to them (for example, those who never take public transit alone after dark) are excluded. Confidence intervals are available upon request.
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Survey on Individual Safety in the Postsecondary Student Population.

## Cohabitation

Recent union formation trends have identified cohabitation as a stage leading to marriage in which many young adults engage. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are diverse motivations for cohabitation, but a majority of cohabitors choose this form of union as a trial marriage or as a prelude to marriage. Because of this trend, more research has explored the experiences of cohabiting couples and has found that cohabitation does have a negative side. Refer back to Chapter 4 for the selection and experience explanations for some of the negative outcomes of cohabitation. Here, we provide a brief overview of the known negative correlates of cohabitation as it relates to union formation.

Cohabitation is not limited to any particular age group yet is more common among young adults. When viewed as either a trial marriage or a prelude to marriage, the implications for later relational outcomes become more important. A large body of research was cited in Chapter 4 to show that premarital cohabitation increases the odds of later marital dissolution. Although some evidence to the contrary has been put forward (Hewitt & DeVaus, 2009), the general body of evidence shows that cohabitation before marriage leads to higher rates of divorce. Cohabitation as a relationship status is also correlated to higher rates of partner violence (Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Brownridge, 2008). Even more severe dysfunction was found in a study by Cavanagh and colleagues (2007), which looked at fathers who fatally abuse their children. This study showed that the majority of men (62 percent) who committed this crime were not the biological father of the victim, and that the great majority were cohabiting with (81 percent) rather than married to (15 percent) the biological mother. It should be noted that, in this study, cohabitation involving non-biological fathers was the family type highlighted.

Some researchers suggest that one potential effect that cohabitation can have on later relationship stability is that it creates inertia, leading to marriage, that is much stronger than that experienced while just dating (Kline et al., 2004; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). These researchers make it clear that they do not feel that the experience of cohabitation increases the risk of future marriage instability so much as that cohabitation makes it more likely that couples with more risks will stay together than they would if they were only dating.

## Newly Married Couples

The fears and anxiety that a couple experiences as they prepare for marriage may be one of the major roadblocks to people marrying. Immersed in a divorce culture, fear of failure seems to affect most couples. The first few years of marriage have been shown to be important in later marital success (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, (2001). "Most marital dysfunction either exists at the beginning of marriages or arises in the first few years" (Glenn, 1998, p. 437). Marriage as a life course stage does not materialize out of thin air. As a result, the early stages and challenges of marriage cannot be separated from the relationship formation process that preceded it.

**Marital Adjustment** Marriage is a time of adjustment, a time when two people must work through the difference that each brings to the committed, legally bound relationship. Poor marital adjustment may lead to dissatisfaction or even to divorce. Several studies have linked poor marital adjustment to increased risk for physical aggression by one's partner, which is preceded by marital distress (Schumacher & Leonard, 2005).

**Expectations** Most people enter marriage with expectations and a degree of idealism that are soon challenged by the realities of life. The sobering reality is that those who have the highest expectations for married life will be the least happy spouses later in the relationship (Miller, Todahl, & Platt, 2010). McNulty and Fisher (2008) found that of the almost 100 married couples that they followed for 4 years, those who had the most realistic expectations of married life were the happiest. Those who had unrealistic expectations were the most disappointed after the honeymoon ended. It seems safe to say that what brings you into a relationship is not enough to keep you in a relationship.

**Conflict** "The most important advice I can give to men who want their marriages to work is to try *not* to avoid conflict" (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 159). Conflict is a normal part of any relationship. People are not identical and their tastes and preferences are not always the same. Whether it is what movie to watch or what restaurant to go to, couples will sometimes experience conflict. As we have seen, how that conflict is handled is much more important than trying to eliminate the conflict. The ability to deal with conflict in a healthy manner early on may set the stage for conflict resolution patterns later in the marriage. Handling conflict in a constructive way can facilitate the growth of an intimate relationship (Helmick & Petersen, 2002).

Carrere and Gottman (1999) examined the marital conflict discussions of 124 newlywed couples, hypothesizing that the first few minutes of a discussion are a good predictor of divorce. Using a detailed coding system that divided approaches into the three categories of positive, negative, and positive-minus-negative affect, measures were taken across five three-minute intervals. The researchers found that it was possible to predict marital outcome of heterosexual couples over a six-year period using just the first three minutes of data from both the husband's and the wife's conversational patterns.

Research has found that correlates of dissolution such as relationship satisfaction and discrepant incomes, are similar for LGBTQ couples and heterosexual couples (Farr et al., 2020). For LGBTQ couples with children, inequities in the division of childcare responsibilities were cited as a reason for relationship dissolution (Farr et al., 2020).

## Parenting

After marriage, the arrival of children may be the next most challenging stage of a family. Two people with the cognitive capacity to rationally solve disagreements and work through conflict are suddenly confronted by a child who is completely dependent on them for survival. Children are an incredible addition to a couple's life, but their arrival also may expose the weaknesses in the family.

Early research on the impact of children on the marital relationship showed both the good and the bad. Couples who had children were more likely to stay together (the good), but also reported a general decrease in marital satisfaction (the bad). More recent studies have demonstrated that not all pathways into parenthood are the same. The arrival of children has been described as "instigating a shift in the marriage whereby most couples are expected to experience a qualitative change in their relationship that is relatively abrupt, adverse in nature, relatively large in magnitude, and likely to persist" (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008, p. 41). The good news is that the more discrete data confirm earlier qualitative research that showed that the arrival of a baby is unlikely to have any lasting negative impact on well-functioning marriages (Cowan & Cowan, 1999). The arrival of children does mark a new phase in family formation. The challenges facing a couple with this arrival involve not only their own satisfaction but also the raising and nurturing of the child. The negative side of parenting is illustrated by the topic of discipline.

**Corporal Punishment** It is generally agreed that children need guidance and direction as they move from complete dependence on caregivers to independence. How that discipline should look has less consensus. Academic literature over the past 40 years has been dominated by reports of the detrimental effects of physical discipline being used on children. These dark elements resulting from physical discipline include aggression, anti-social behaviour, psychological distress, and behavioural issues later in life such as increased delinquency, substance abuse, a greater proclivity to violence, and reduced socio-economic attainment (Gershoff, 2002; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997; Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). Nevertheless, at the end of the twentieth century, 94 percent of American parents of 3- and 4-year-olds felt the need to use physical discipline.

The central issue with regard to the discrepancy between research and practice is whether all forms of **corporal punishment** lead to the same negative outcomes in children or whether some forms of physical discipline may have positive outcomes. Ellison and Bradshaw (2009) argue that the motive behind physical discipline may hold a clue to the direction of the outcomes. They point to a growing body of literature that "indicates that the effects of corporal punishment may differ across cultural and other subgroups within the population (Baumrind, 1997; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997). Specifically, within cultural communities in which this practice is common, even normative, its effects are less harmful, or perhaps not harmful at all (Ellison & Bradshaw, 2009, pp. 336–337). Durrant, Trocmé, Fallon, Milne, and Black (2009) examine the Supreme Court of Canada's attempt in 2004 to distinguish between reasonable and abusive coercive force on children. Table 11.2 shows maltreatment investigations involving children aged 0 to 15 years in all provinces and territories except Quebec. Sixty-three of 400 child-welfare service areas across Canada were included in the survey.

**Child Neglect and Abuse** There is no ambiguity regarding child neglect and abuse. Although the definitions of neglect and abuse may be debated, the social

abhorrence of child neglect and abuse is unanimous. The social context that defines child neglect and abuse is illustrated in the discussion of corporal punishment. It is not uncommon to hear anecdotes from adults regarding being taken to the woodshed and being given a "licking" with a switch or a rod. This behaviour may have been normative in the not too distant past, but it would not be accepted even by proponents of corporal punishment today. One only needs to look at other cultures to realize that physical punishment remains a normal part of educational institutions' approach to discipline.

Child abuse may take the form of neglect rather than violent acts. The results can be equally devastating. Mills et al. (2011) found that abuse and neglect, independent of one another, are correlated with decreased levels of cognitive performance at age 14 years. Data collection occurred from children's mothers at 3 to 5 days after delivery, 6 months of age, and 5 years of age. Outcome measures were gathered from assessments of the children's abilities at 14 years of age. Even after controlling for potential confounding factors, Mills et al. noted that abuse and neglect have detrimental implications for child development.

Box 11.3

## 6 Signs of People Who Have Been Abused

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZFFZpKO0l0

Family dysfunction continues to have a negative impact on children as they age. Research on children aged 4 to 9 years shows that prolonged high levels of family dysfunction have distinct gender implications (Pagani, Japel, Vaillancourt, & Tremblay, 2010). Girls in particular demonstrate higher levels of indirect aggression, defined as more underhanded and relational means of causing harm to another, such as generating rumours, cattiness, social exclusion, or indiscriminate disclosure of confidential information (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988).

Box 11.4

## Mother Allegedly on Facebook while Baby Drowned

An American mother who told police her 13-month-old son drowned in the bathtub while she was playing a game on Facebook was charged in 2011 with child abuse resulting in death.

Shannon Johnson, 34, of Colorado was advised of the charge against her via a video hookup from the jail where she is being held on a $100,000 bond, said Jennifer Finch, spokeswoman for the Weld County District Attorney's Office.

Johnson requested a public defender during the brief hearing and another hearing was set for later in the month, Finch said.

Under questioning by police after the boy died at a Denver-area hospital last September, Johnson admitted she placed the baby in the bathtub and went into another room to play the Facebook game "Cafe World."

She also checked in with friends and watched videos on the site while the boy bathed alone, according to an affidavit filed in the case.

When she didn't hear any sounds from the boy after 10 minutes, she found him slumped over face down in the bathwater making "gurgling" sounds, according to the affidavit. Johnson then called 911, and the boy was airlifted to the hospital where he was pronounced dead from drowning.

When police arrived at Johnson's home they found a laptop opened to Facebook.

Johnson told police that she frequently left the boy unattended in the bathtub because he was "independent," he liked to be left alone, and she didn't want him to be a "mama's boy," according to the affidavit.

Police also questioned the boy's grandmother, who said he suffered a seizure while she was baby-sitting him a month before he died. She told police she warned her daughter about leaving her grandson alone in the tub after the seizure.

When police asked Johnson about the wisdom of leaving a young child with a history of seizures alone in water, Johnson admitted that "it was so stupid."

She was sentenced to April 11, 2011 to 10 years in prison.

Source: http://www.torontosun.com/news/world/2011/01/16/16907941.html

Box 11.4 contains a news article on a disturbing new phenomenon that involves child neglect because of internet addiction. Young (2009) reports that studies on internet addiction originated in the United States but that recent studies show that internet addiction is a growing problem in countries such as Italy, Pakistan, Czech Republic, Korea, China, and Taiwan. Child neglect is no longer the result of chemical addictions but of online addictions as well.

**Incest** Nothing epitomizes the negative side of the family like the universal taboo of incest. Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists discovered early in their work that sexual relations between two close kin was met with general social disapproval in virtually all societies and across all social strata and times. Research conducted more than 25 years ago found that an estimated 1 million Americans were victims of father–daughter incest (Finkelhor, 1984). This form of incest is the most widely reported form, followed

by stepfather–stepdaughter and brother–sister. Lester (1972) found little incest between mother and son, a finding supported by other researchers.

Speculation as to why reports of male incest may be lower centre around socialization issues that may make males less likely to disclose incest. They may fear that it will signify weakness or homosexuality. This is consistent with data that indicate that 80 to 90 percent of reported victims are female and 90 percent of perpetrators are male (Russell, 1986). The disturbing nature of incest is that, according to Vanderbilt (1992), perpetrators can be uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandparents, stepparents, stepbrothers, stepsisters, brothers, or sisters and that the abuse typically takes place within the family home. The pattern of incest usually begins in preadolescence (Phelan, 1986), when children are more vulnerable and more easily intimidated by adult perpetrators.

**Parent-Adolescent Issues** Increased stress and conflict during the adolescent years is almost taken for granted in Western culture. Adolescence is viewed as a time of growing independence, and that seeking of independence does not always correspond to the parents' comfort level. Conflict at this stage is not restricted to one or two particular areas of concern. Early adolescence in particular is a time of elevated conflict (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Steinberg, 1990). In a study of middle school–aged children, Allison and Schultz (2004) found that the frequency of conflict was at its highest level in grade 7 and was significantly lower in grade 8 for males. This is consistent with the view that parent–adolescent conflict peaks during the transition to adolescence and then subsides (Laursen et al., 1998). Allison and Schultz (2004) also point to the gendered nature of parent–adolescent conflict. Research found that parental conflict with daughters was higher than with sons (Smetana & Asquith, 1994) and that mother–daughter conflict was more prevalent than conflict in other dyads (Holmbeck & Hill, 1991).

Autonomy and independence are sought by emerging adolescents, but parents are concerned about responsibility and the development of good life choices. Conflict is less likely to occur over the choice of friends, clothing, personal hygiene, and going out unsupervised than over character issues such as lying, swearing, and getting into trouble outside the home, with the highest frequency of conflict reported over substance abuse (smoking, drinking, drug use). Parents may feel that if these character issues are not a concern, then greater freedom can be given to the teen (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

The issue of household responsibility has been identified as a common area of parent–adolescent conflict. As teens seek greater independence, they become less excited about being told what to do and contributing to family functioning. Allison and Schultz (2004) again highlight the gendered nature of family conflict. Their research showed that parent–daughter conflict was more frequent than parent–son conflict. Greater expectations for daughters to perform household duties, dress appropriately, and not be disruptive at home during the early years of adolescence seem to be the cause of this difference (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). This gender difference was also manifest in parents being more restrictive of their daughters' freedom to go places alone, choose friends, make decisions about money, and decide how to spend their free time.

## Sibling Violence

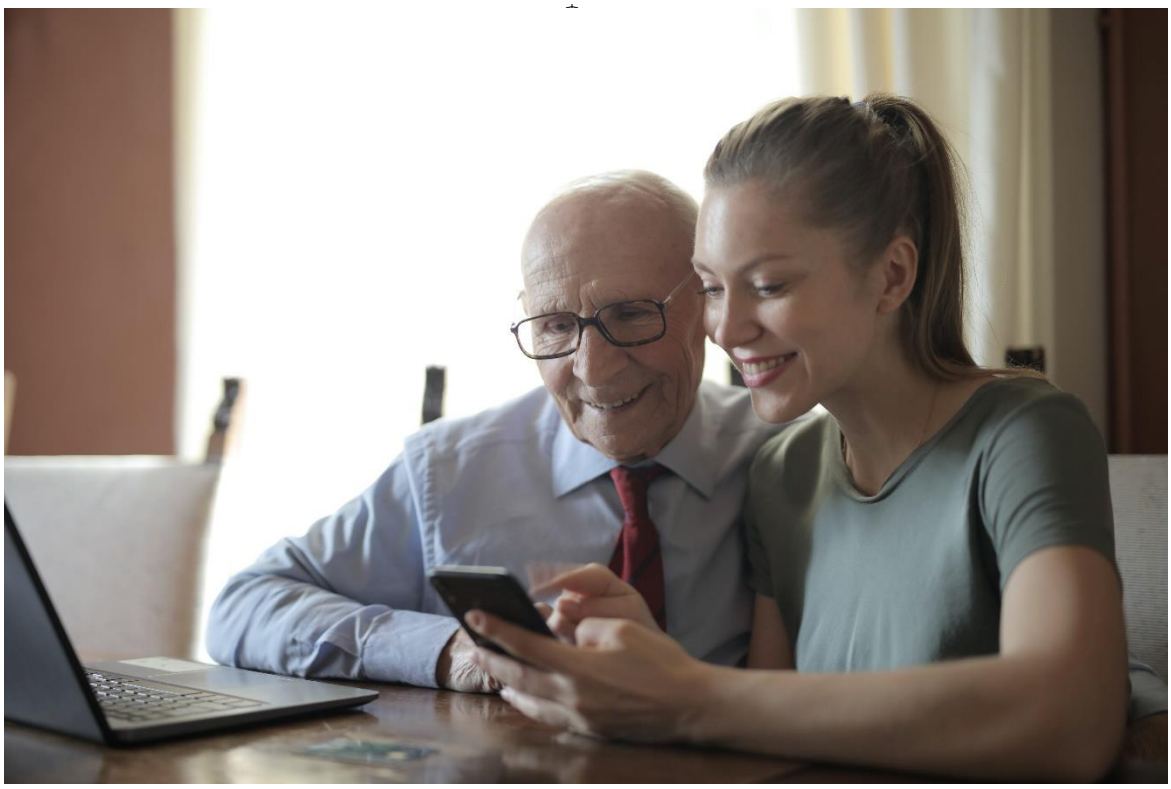
A form of family abuse seldom discussed in the popular media is one that occurs between siblings. Mackey, Fromuth, and Kelly (2010) cite several scholars who found that sibling violence is one of the leading forms of childhood victimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005) yet goes unrecognized (Cornell & Gelles, 1985). They point out that the way in which sibling abuse is classified often leads to wide variety in its reported prevalence. Some studies state that 35 percent (Duncan, 1999) to more than 60 percent (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005) of respondents reported committing physically violent acts against a sibling. Mackey et al. (2010) report that the highest levels of victimization were indicated by Simonelli, Mullis, Elliott, and Pierce's (2002) study of college undergraduates, in which 71 percent of men and 88 percent of women reported physical aggression by a sibling.

## Abuse of Parents by Adolescents

Most of the discussion regarding abusive family dysfunction has been unidirectional, or parent to child. Unfortunately, the abusive pattern operates in both directions. Data confirm that some children are physically and psychologically abusive to their parents, most often the mother. Stewart, Burns, and Leonard (2007) cite several authors (Cottrell, 2001; Cottrell & Finlayson, 1996; Cottrell & Monk, 2004) who argued that parent abuse is a serious social problem that has received inadequate attention from researchers and service providers. Cottrell and Finlayson (1996) noted that restricting the definition of abuse to physical assaults can cloud the severity of the problem. Research shows that threats, emotional manipulation, and other non-physical abuse can cause equal distress. Stewart et al. (2007) state that in Cottrell's sample of Canadian parents, there were reports of physical, verbal, and psychological forms of abuse, including "emotional terrorism." The profiles of the victim and the abuser were similar. Mothers and stepmothers were the most likely victims. The perpetrator's abusive actions were often associated with substance abuse or with psychiatric problems. Estimates of the prevalence of child to parent violence are in area of 10 percent. Based on interviews with parents in intact families, Cornell and Gelles (1985) estimated that 9 percent of all 10- to 17-year-olds in the United States had assaulted one of their parents in the previous year. Another national sample estimated that between 6.5 and 10.8 percent of adolescent males in the sample had assaulted their parents (Peek, Fisher, & Kidwell, 1985).

## Adult Children and Elder Abuse

Child to parent abuse is not confined to the adolescent years. Adult children have also been found to be physically, psychologically, and financially abusive to their parents, again primarily to their mothers. In a large British study, Cooper, Selwood, and Livingston (2008) found that more than 6 percent of the older general population, a quarter of vulnerable adults, and a third of family caregivers reported being involved in significant abuse.



One explanation given for the onset of abusive behaviour toward the elderly is the stress that caregivers are under. Most informal care is provided by family members. In a comparison of caregivers serving relatives with dementia to those serving relatives without dementia, Ory, Hoffman, Yee, Tennstedt, and Schulz (1999) reported higher rates of stress and conflict among those caring for relatives with dementia. Identifying who is perpetrating the abuse is a challenge, with some studies indicating that adult offspring are most likely to commit abuse (Paveza et al., 1992) and other studies pointing to spousal caregivers as more likely to abuse (Pillemer & Suitor, 1992).

## Intergenerational Issues

The final area to touch on regarding the negative side of the family is the unsettling knowledge that most of the topics discussed in this chapter are often found to repeat from one generation to another. Sassler, Cunningham, and Lichter (2009, p. 759) discuss the intergenerational patterns of relationship formation and conclude: "High rates of union dissolution and remarriage in the past have obvious implications for current marriage patterns. Demographic momentum is built into current family patterns through the intergenerational reproduction of divorce and family instability (Amato, 1996; Amato & Rogers, 1997; Teachman, 2002)." Abusive behaviour has also been linked to intergenerational influences. Primarily relying on social learning theory (Bandura, 1978), which states that exposure to violent acts provides a script for future behaviour, research has shown a link between exposure to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and later likelihood of similar personal behaviours. Box 11.3 provides an up-to-date, comprehensive summary of the literature on intergenerational transmission of family dysfunction.

Box 11.5

## Empirical Evidence of Intergenerational Transmission (IGT) of Family Dysfunction

Evidence supporting the IGT of violence theory has been accumulated for married couples as well as dating relationships for both adolescents and emerging adults (Ballif-Spanvill et al., 2007; Breslin, Riggs, O'Leary, & Arias, 1990; Carr & VanDeusen, 2002; Craig & Sprang, 2007; Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer, 2003; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Foshee et al., 1999; Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003; Stith et al., 2000; Whitfield, Anda, Dube, & Felitti, 2003; Yexley, Borowsky, & Ireland, 2002). For example, large-scale studies have reported clear evidence of an IGT of marital aggression (Doumas, Margolin, & John, 1994; Pagelow, 1981; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Considering adolescents, between 7% and 15% of youths have experienced serious physical victimization by an intimate partner (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997; Bergman, 1992; Coker et al., 2000; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001), and social learning of violence has been supported in varying degrees for this cohort (O'Keeffe, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986; Schwartz, O'Leary, & Kendziora, 1997). For instance, Foshee and colleagues' (1999) findings support this the- ory whereby 21% of female perpetration and 15% of male perpetration was accounted for bysocial learning theory–mediating variables such as aggressive conflict-response style, expect- ing positive outcomes, and accepting dating violence. However, several null findings have been reported between witnessing interparen- tal violence and subsequent dating violence (Capaldi & Clark, 1998; Carlson, 1990; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990; MacEwen & Barling, 1988; Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998), leading to the conclusion that the majority of children experiencing violence in their homes do not grow up to be violent adults (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987). In addition, some studies have found an association only for males but not for females (e.g., O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994). This has led some researchers to suggest that main effects may vary within subgroups (Foshee, Ennett, Bauman, Benefield, & Suchindran, 2005) or that methodological and measurement inconsistencies exist in previous research.

The prevalence of college-age students witnessing serious interparental physical violence while growing up typically ranges from 10% to 30% (Edleson, 1999; Jankowski, Leitenberg, Henning, & Coffey, 1999). Similarly, college students report rates at 20% to 50% for experiencing physical abuse in their own current intimate relationships (Arias, Samios, & O'Leary, 1987; Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Jankowski et al., 1999; Neufeld, McNamara, & Ertl, 1999; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). Although psychological violence has gained less empirical attention, one study (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985) suggested that psychological aggression might occur in up to 80% of young adult dating relationships. These high rates were supported in a sample of undergraduate students, whereby Riggs & O'Leary (1996) found that at any time in their relationship only 7% of men and 3% of women reported that they had not engaged in any verbal/psychological aggression within any intimate relationship.

Source: Black, Sussman, and Unger (2010).

## CONCLUSION

The universal social institution of the family has provided for the care, nurturance, and socialization of humanity through time. In the twenty-first century, the motivation for family formation has shifted from survival to one better described as self-fulfillment. As a result, it seems that there is even greater awareness of the negative side of the family. The conflict and abusive behaviours described in this chapter have always existed within the family, to one degree or another. Explanations of why they occur and why they continue to occur are varied. The important point is that they have occurred and will continue to occur. These negative behaviours and actions are more palatable if they occur in times of war or at the hands of a deranged character in a horror movie. Yet when they occur in the very institution that we consider a safe haven and protection from the negative elements of society, we are caught off guard. How could these things happen? How could something so good become so bad? The only somewhat plausible overarching explanation may simply be that if the potential for the family wasn't so good, the opportunity for it to become so bad would not exist.

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Despite all of its good qualities, the family also has a negative side that ranges from increased stress to intimate violence and abuse.
- The nature versus nurture debate is important in the context of interfamily dysfunction. Why do people who share the same genetic material or who commit themselves to one another sometimes harm each other?
- Two important family theories used to understand the negative side of family behaviour are the family development theory and the family stress theory.
- Reuben Hill developed the ABC-X model of family stress through research on families' adjustment to the absence of fathers during World War II and their eventual return. His concern was identifying the factors found to mediate the stress in these families.
- Hill defined *A* as the provoking event or stressor, *B* as the family's resources or strengths at the time of the event, and *C* as the meaning attached to the event by the family. In the ABC-X model, the *X* represents the stressor and crisis.
- The circumplex model identifies the three dimensions of flexibility, cohesion, and communication as foundational in examining how stress affects families.
- Families across the life course face challenges in dealing with stress and conflict. Each family stage provides unique challenges that must be negotiated. Stress, conflict, and abuse have the potential to occur.

- Drug-facilitated sexual assaults as a percentage of all sexual assaults have been on the rise in Canada.
- Dating violence has been reported to affect more than a third of both male and female college students (Foshee, 1996).
- John Gottman highlighted the normative nature of conflict in relationships when he stated, "The most important advice I can give to men who want their marriages to work is to try *not* to avoid conflict" (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 159).
- Corporal punishment continues to be a hotly debated social issue in the twenty-first century. Most researchers and government agencies would like to see it eliminated as a disciplinary technique.
- Child neglect as a form of abuse has been in the headlines more frequently as parents form internet addictions.
- Family conflict is not always hierarchical. Sibling conflict in the form of physical aggression was reported by 71 percent of men and 88 percent of women in study of college students (Simonelli et al., 2002).
- Children abusing their parents is another part of the negative side of the family. Studies have looked at both adolescents and adults who have been abusive toward their parents. Elder abuse often results from the stress that caregivers are under.
- Unfortunately, abusive family patterns are often transferred from one generation to another. Black, Sussman, and Unger (2010) provide a comprehensive overview of the current literature in this area.

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. This chapter presents stress within a family context as normal. With this lens, consider stressful situations in your own family of origin and how you felt during those times.
2. Considering the different plausible explanations of the origin of family stress (sociobiological, psychological, and sociological), which do you feel stands on its own the best?
3. Many unhealthy examples of family stress are presented in this chapter. Which behaviours do you find most difficult to comprehend?

## Glossary

**ABC-X model** A model originally developed by Reuben Hill to aid in understanding the way in which families adjusted to fathers being away during World War II. *A* is the provoking event or stressor, *B* is the family's resources or strengths at the time of the event, *C* is the meaning attached to the event by the family, and *X* represents the stressor and crisis.

**chronic jealousy** A more permanent quality of a person's character with little variation attributed to situational circumstances.

**circumplex model** A model of family functioning made popular by David Olson. It incorporates three distinct dimensions of family functioning identified by most contemporary family

researchers as being important to family health. Cohesion is the degree to which a family balances the "we" and "me" identity within a family, flexibility is the degree to which a family balances the rigidity and adaptability of family roles, and communication is the dimension of family functioning that facilitates change and adjustment between the other two dimensions.

**corporal punishment** The term commonly used to describe child discipline that involves physical means such as spanking.

**double ABC-X model** An expanded version of the ABC-X model that incorporates the additional dimension of time and allows the model to be applied over the life course.

**family development theory** A theory focused on the systematic and patterned changes that families experience over the life course. It is unique in its attempt to use the family rather than the individuals in the family as the level of analysis.

**family stress theory** A theory that uses the ABC-X model as a means of understanding family functioning.

**intimate terrorism** The most destructive form of couple violence. It almost exclusively involves males causing extensive bodily harm to or the death of their female partners.

**nature versus nurture** The debate over how individual characteristics are developed. Nature assumes that the characteristics have biological origins while nurture attributes characteristics to social influences.

**relationship jealousy** In contrast to chronic jealousy, relationship jealousy is situationally based and predicated on the condition of the relationship.

**situational couple violence** A term used to describe the less extreme forms of violence that are quite prevalent in relationships and are less gendered in their use.

**universal taboo** The term applied to incest, or sexual relations between two close family members, since it has been found to be socially unacceptable in one form or another across societies and across time.

## Connections

www.prepare-enrich.com
www.facesiv.com/home.html
http://agecon.uwyo.edu/eruralfamilies/ERFLibrary/Readings/CircumplexModelOfMaritalAndFamilySystems.pdf
www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a907454261&fulltext=713240928
http://jacksonville.com/news/crime/2010-10-27/story/jacksonville-mom-shakes-baby-interrupting-farmville-pleads-guilty-murder