



Validating vehicles of recovery for violence victims

Dr Martine Hébert is a researcher who focuses on understanding factors relating to sexual abuse against children and dating violence among adolescents and young adults. Below, she discusses her inspirations and some interesting aspects of her work

Can you begin by providing a brief introduction to your background and current research endeavours?

I trained as a clinical child psychologist and, since then, have been developing my career at the Department of Sexology at the Université du Québec à Montréal since 1999. There, I lead an innovative research programme that elucidates a diversity of profiles in victims of child sexual abuse, validating models of trauma recovery and investigating interpersonal violence among adolescents. In relying on epidemiological studies – as well as longitudinal investigations of clinical samples, I have created longlasting collaborative research infrastructures with partners whose mission it is to provide services to vulnerable youth.

What inspires you in your day-to-day work?

Having worked in the field of trauma for the past 25 years, I have witnessed the advances in research and the concrete impacts they have had on the development of best practices, in terms of treatment and service delivery. It is extremely rewarding to know that my work – and that of my colleagues in the field – has contributed to more suitable intervention techniques and innovative approaches to helping children, teenagers and adults deal with traumatic personal situations. One example is the implementation of a best practice intervention in the only Child and Youth Advocacy Center in Quebec, the Marie-Vincent Center. I have always believed in promoting treatment programmes based on people's strengths and ability to overcome difficulties, as well as encouraging research partnerships with various organisations. To see such evidence-based treatment effectively reduce the health burdens associated with interpersonal trauma is truly inspiring.

You conducted a survey to document the prevalence of violence in dating relationships. Can you give insight into what you found?

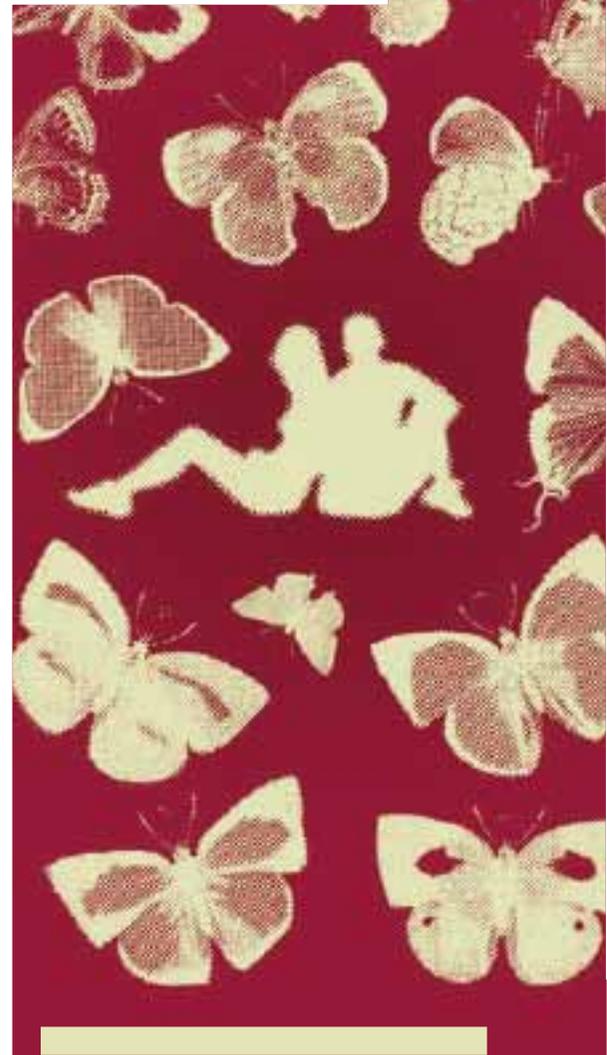
The findings from the Youths' Romantic Relationships (YRR) Project indicate that dating

violence (DV) is a prevalent problem among Quebec youth, affecting more than half of all youths in relationships. A more in-depth look into the various manifestations of DV reveals that there is considerable diversity in victimisation profiles, highlighting the need for a tailored approach to prevention efforts. DV is also associated with detrimental health outcomes, such as alcohol and substance use and suicidal ideations.

Victims of DV also report that they feel less able to seek help, thus contributing to the isolation of victims. In addition, some youths are particularly vulnerable to DV, namely victims of child sexual abuse and LGBTQ youth. Therefore, prevention efforts must take these findings into consideration in order to properly address dating violence among adolescents, while considering adapting interventions for those who are at a greater risk of being victimised, and encouraging victims to seek support and offer tools on how to get out of an abusive relationship.

For you, what are the most interesting elements of your work and why?

I enjoy collaborating in networks of researchers, practitioners, decision makers and other actors in the field to further scientific knowledge on trauma and recovery, thereby improving services. I also take tremendous joy in providing a unique and stimulating setting for the training of young scholars and helping them find different opportunities for them to develop their expertise and achieve their goals. Moreover, actively participating in the development of knowledge transfer activities is something that I take a great interest in. Disseminating results to healthcare practitioners, decision makers and the general public through partnerships, with various intervention settings operating in the field is a part of research that I find very stimulating. This is possible because practitioners are truly invested in optimising the uptake of research findings in their clinical practice.



Between 7 and 45 per cent of youths aged 13-20 in North America have been victims of dating violence. Thus, there is an ever-pressing need to discover why this prevalence of incidence occurs

OBJECTIVE

To identify the protective factors against child sexual abuse and adolescent dating violence at individual, familial, social and community levels.

COLLABORATORS

Gabriel Boisvert, Conseil Québécois LGBT • **Louise Bourassa**, Centre jeunesse de la Mauricie et du Centre-du-Québec (CJMCQ) • **Simon Drolet**, Centre d'intervention en abus sexuel pour la famille (CIASF) • **Marie Eve Girard**, Entraide Jeunesse • **Hertel Huard Jr**; **Annie Tremblay**, Tel-Jeunes • **Félix Joyal Lacerte**, Youth Worker • **Julie Laforest**, Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec (INSPQ) • **Danielle Marquis**; **Julie Pelletier**, Ministère de l'Éducation, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (MEESR) • **Lysandre Ouimet**, Parents-Unis Repentigny Lanaudière (PURL) • **Pierre H Tremblay**, Direction de santé publique de l'ASSS de Montréal

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DR MARTINE HÉBERT has a PhD in Psychology. She is conducting research on the diversity of profiles in sexual abuse survivors, exploring trajectories of victimisation and pathways to resilience. She is also principal investigator of the Youths' Romantic Relationships Project investigating the link between sexual abuse and dating violence.



and adapt a dating violence prevention programme for child sexual abuse victims.

Ultimately, Hébert and her team aim to diminish the significant burden associated with child sexual abuse and adolescent dating violence. In educating adolescents and increasing awareness, successful and harmonious interpersonal relationships can be fostered – which benefits the individuals involved, but also the wider community.

The promotion of healthy and harmonious relationships

The Department of Sexology at the **Université du Québec à Montréal** is home to a group of researchers who focus on child sexual abuse and adolescent dating violence. By identifying the protective factors at individual, familial, social and community levels, they aim to reduce the impacts of violence

DATING VIOLENCE IS behaviour in a romantic relationship that is controlling, abusive and aggressive. It can manifest as verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse and affects both males and females, though often in different ways. Adolescent girls are at greater risk of sexual victimisation by a romantic partner compared with adolescent boys. In addition, teenage girls report greater fear and distress following episodes of dating violence.

Astonishingly, between 7 and 45 per cent of youths aged 13-20 in North America have been victims of dating violence. Thus, there is an ever-pressing need to discover why this prevalence of incidence occurs so that preventive measures can be put in place.

FOUR STUDIES, SEVERAL AIMS

With that in mind, a team of researchers at the Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada has developed a variety of projects aimed at identifying the risk factors and consequences associated with adolescent dating violence. Led by Dr Martine Hébert, and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the research team on interpersonal trauma has recently conducted four main studies.

Study one involves the first representative study of teen dating violence among 8,000 Quebec adolescents aged 14-18 in 34 high schools. Study two analyses both risk and protective factors related to interpersonal violence in vulnerable populations, namely teenagers who have experienced child sexual abuse and LGBT youth. Study three comprises an in-lab analysis of couple interactions among adolescents, and study four focuses on developing prevention tools for youth, school personnel and community workers.

EVIDENCE FOR PREVALENCE OF INCIDENCE

Throughout the course of their various projects, Hébert's team has uncovered information relating to the high prevalence of adolescent dating violence. "It can be attributed to a lack of sufficient education on healthy relationships and communication," explains Hébert. "Education and awareness are necessary for the prevention of such issues.

Indeed, without proper communication skills and strategies to adequately resolve conflicts within interpersonal relationships, youth may not be equipped to properly navigate their first romantic relationships."

Hébert has therefore set about helping youth develop such skills and promoting ideas centred on respecting themselves and others. Interestingly, the team has found that those youth who have been exposed to violence, directly or indirectly, are at a greater risk of experiencing violence in their dating relationships. This finding has emphasised the need to focus on more vulnerable youth to minimise their risk of experiencing more abuse and break the cycle of violence.

Alongside the longitudinal study Hébert has conducted, the team established a knowledge transfer campaign following the Youths' Romantic Relationship (YRR) Project. The campaign provides an opportunity for school communities across Quebec to inform students about the results of the study. As well as imbuing the students with a sense of involvement, it increases awareness with the potential to reduce incidence of dating violence. The framework of both the project and campaign has seen the development of tools that are available for all teachers and stakeholders to use as they see fit.

FOSTERING HARMONY

In the future, Hébert's research programme will focus on a two-pronged treatment approach that fosters healthy, respectful and non-violent intimate relationships, while offering support to sexual abuse victims through therapy and support groups. To achieve this goal, Hébert must continue to work in close partnership with community organisations offering services to youth: "We want to innovate by offering a more tailored-based approach to prevention and intervention strategies," she explains. In the context of the CIHR Team on Boys' and Men's Health led by Christine Wekerte, she will conduct an in depth analysis of the outcomes of teenage boys victims of sexual violence