

Above Retrenchment? Anti-Violence Policy in Ontario and British Columbia in Neo-Liberal Times

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in Neo-Liberal Times¹
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Governments in Canada and other Western democracies have to varying extents embraced neo-liberal approaches to the welfare state since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Right-wing regimes including the Reagan, Thatcher and Mulroney administrations in the U.S., U.K. and Canada respectively, each made significant efforts to “remove the ‘nanny’ state, to put an end to a perceived culture of welfare dependence, and to reinvigorate the nation by giving free rein to individuals’ own entrepreneurial proclivities” (Kendall 2003:6). Feminist political scientists have argued that this welfare state retrenchment has been disproportionately devastating to women’s lives in these countries as more women are employed by the state and are more dependent on welfare state programs than men (Brodie 1996, Bashevkin 1998). Even though more moderate centre-right governments replaced these regimes, it appears that neo-liberalism and the culture of welfare state retrenchment continued to negatively influence government policy, particularly with respect to women’s issues (Bashevkin 2002).

Combatting violence against women has been a key policy issue for Canadian women since the early 1970s when grassroots groups established the first transition houses and shelters to meet local demand. Since then advocates have lobbied the state for funding for adequate service delivery, better and more effective laws to protect women victims, and more attention to be paid to the root causes of violence including women’s structural societal inequality. These demands require heightened state involvement and increased public spending and thus run against the tide of retrenchment in liberal democracies. However, researchers have not all agreed that neo-liberalism has negatively impacted state willingness to address the issue of violence against women. According to S. Laurel Weldon, some see violence against women policies as “mainly symbolic measures that involve little redistribution. For this reason, they present an opportunity for right-wing or neoliberal governments to mollify women’s organizations without spending any money” (2002:58). However, Weldon questions this position noting that other neo-liberal regimes have refused to address the anti-violence issue because they saw it as a private instead of a public matter. Still other right-wing administrations, particularly the Republican controlled Congress in the United States, authorized nearly a billion dollars in anti-violence expenditures in 1998 in an era of budget cutting and deficit reduction (2002:59).

Since anti-violence measures generally cost less than other welfare state programs², is it possible that anti-violence policies are more likely to be promoted and protected and therefore are virtually “above retrenchment”? How have governments responded to women’s movement claims in the area of violence against women over the

¹ This paper is based in part on sections of my unpublished (2006) doctoral dissertation, “Governments and Women’s Movements: Explaining Child Care and Anti-Violence Policy in Ontario and British Columbia, 1970-2000.” I would like to thank my thesis supervision committee of Sylvia Bashevkin, David Rayside and Graham White for their helpful comments throughout the dissertation process, which have also influenced this conference paper.

² This is particularly true with respect to state child care expenditures. See Collier 2006.

past 20 years? Has neo-liberalism impacted women's anti-violence policy positively or negatively?

This paper seeks to answer these questions in the Canadian context, focusing specifically at the provincial level. I have chosen to focus on the sub-state level because fiscal responsibility for social program delivery has been steadily downloaded from the federal to the provincial level – a reflection of neoliberal trends. This was evident in the 1990 cap on Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) payments to the three "have" provinces (Alberta, Ontario and BC) and the reduction of transfer payments through the introduction of the amalgamated Canada Health and Social Transfer, which replaced CAP in 1996-97. Thus the provinces have assumed more and more responsibility for welfare state programs of particular interest to women, including those addressing violence against women.³ Although criminal laws that target the problem of violence against women fall under federal jurisdiction, the provision of anti-violence shelter services, public education programs, directives to police forces, legal aid funding, and other anti-violence services fall directly under provincial control. Many of these services have also been funded through the shared-cost CAP program.

Even though anti-violence services and advocacy began at the local grassroots level, less scholarly attention has been paid to provincial violence against women policy. This paper aims to shed light on this important level of women's movement activity and to add to our wider understanding of the impact of welfare state retrenchment in the provinces and how this directly impacts women's lives. To do this, I have chosen to compare provincial anti-violence policy expenditures and program changes between 1985 and 2005 in Ontario and British Columbia. I will argue that although aggregate expenditure statistics show that all governments have generally increased funding for anti-violence programs, there has been much more variation in how responsive this spending has been to feminist anti-violence advocates over this 20-year period. Policy variation can best be explained by the partisan theory of public policy which argues that ideological differences between different party governments explain diversity in public policy directions. The paper further argues that although party differences have been somewhat muted during neo-liberal times, significant differences in left and right-wing approaches to violence against women were still present. These differences suggest that the impact of neo-liberalism on anti-violence policy is generally worse under right-wing regimes than left-wing ones. This means that anti-violence policy is not above retrenchment as right-wing governments have demonstrated a willingness to challenge and ultimately delegitimize feminist approaches to the issue.

In order to illustrate these arguments, the paper will begin by briefly outlining the theoretical debate between welfare state retrenchment convergence and the partisan theory of public policy. It then will describe the methodological choices for the comparative study, will compare anti-violence policy in the two provincial cases and conclude by directly addressing the questions posed above.

³ The term violence against women is often used to cover a wide variety of violent acts perpetrated against both women and children, including child abuse. This paper will not be using the phrase to describe children's experiences of violence even though it recognizes that oftentimes the violent situation in a home affects both the mother and the children. Gotell (1998) makes a similar clarification, choosing to exclude a discussion of child abuse in her study as it "den[ies] the specificity of child abuse, a practice rooted in unequal power relations based upon age and in the construction of children as less than 'persons'"(71).

Welfare State Convergence and the Partisan Theory of Public Policy

There is solid evidence of general welfare state convergence in the comparative public policy literature. Bashevkin's comparative study of women's policy in the US, UK and Canada concluded that welfare state retrenchment continued between the 1990s and 2000, even though more moderate governments held power during these years (2002:14)⁴. Studies by Olsen (2002) and Brodie (1996) also draw similar conclusions supporting the presence of welfare state retrenchment in the 1980s and beyond. Rand Dyck's (1996) observation of provincial neoliberal budgetary convergence - which saw provinces pursuing balanced budgets and trimming social program expenditures - was also made based on an analysis of a variety of different party governments. Katherine Teghtsoonian, while recognizing diversity in government approaches, argues that the prominence of neo-liberal ideology created tension for left-of-centre NDP governments in British Columbia during the 1990s and likely modified their social justice commitments (2003:35). These studies suggest that even though partisan differences were not erased during neo-liberal times, they were more muted and relatively insignificant as governments seemed to converge in their approaches to welfare state policy.

However, Colin Bennett has argued that sometimes policy convergence conclusions are drawn because studies fail to look closely at the salient public policy details. Thus "aggregate cross-sectional studies...in some ways resemble photographs taken from a high-flying aircraft; the main features stand out, but much [important] detail is lost" (1991:219). If we look closely enough and see more policy divergence instead of convergence, this can best be explained by the partisan theory of public policy. The theory that party ideology or ideas explain why governments make different policy decisions is supported by authors such as D.A. Hibbs Jr. who argue that party composition is often the main cause of variation in policy outputs and choice in constitutional democracies (in Schmidt 1996:155).⁵ When researching women's policy, I argue that it is essential to look at the finer details of state policy responses to not just establish whether spending increased or decreased, but to determine how well the policy output addresses long-standing women's movement demands. This is arguably even more important in the area of violence against women because the way the issue is framed speaks directly to whether the state is open to addressing feminist critiques of women's structural inequality or not – which feminists have consistently identified as one of the main causes, if not *the* main cause, of violence. Bashevkin argues that if the state is successful in casting anti-violence policy in gender neutral terms, it essentially means that "women's movements are likely losing control of the issue" (1998:243).

By comparing anti-violence policy development between 1985 and 2005 in Ontario and BC, this paper can test whether significant provincial policy convergence was evident or whether different ideological governments responded in unique ways to feminist anti-violence demands. The latter would reaffirm claims made by the partisan theory of public policy, and would lead us to question the existence of widespread welfare state retrenchment convergence. It will also help clarify what impact, if any, neo-liberalism has had on anti-violence policy.

⁴ Bashevkin's study recognizes diversity in government approaches, but still affirms the existence of tangible welfare state convergence despite these differences.

⁵ See also Castles 1982 and Hicks & Swank 1992.

Comparing Ontario and BC

To uncover the impact of neo-liberalism on anti-violence policy, this paper will comparatively measure the progression of provincial government anti-violence expenditures and child care policies and programs between 1985 and 2005 in Ontario and British Columbia. Ontario and BC were chosen for this study because prior to 2000 they were both "have" provinces in the federation and were impacted greater by social policy downloading, particularly since 1990, while at the same time being in generally better fiscal positions to autonomously support welfare state services. As well, both provinces were governed at certain time-points by decidedly right-wing regimes that embraced a neo-liberal willingness to cut welfare state programs under the auspices of balancing budgets and increasing productivity. Finally, both provinces also saw variety in government during these twenty years, as centrist, left- and right-wing parties held office (see Tables 1 and 3 below).

Anti-violence policy is measured in two ways to avoid the pitfalls of missed detail noted by Bennett above. First, the paper measures anti-violence expenditures as a percentage of overall program spending for each province, where possible⁶, over the 20-year period. However, it recognizes that positive and negative changes in programs and policies can often be hidden behind aggregate spending statistics. Therefore it also qualitatively measures significant changes in policy during these years to ascertain how closely the policy mirrors demands made by provincial anti-violence advocates.

Anti-Violence Expenditure and Policy in Ontario

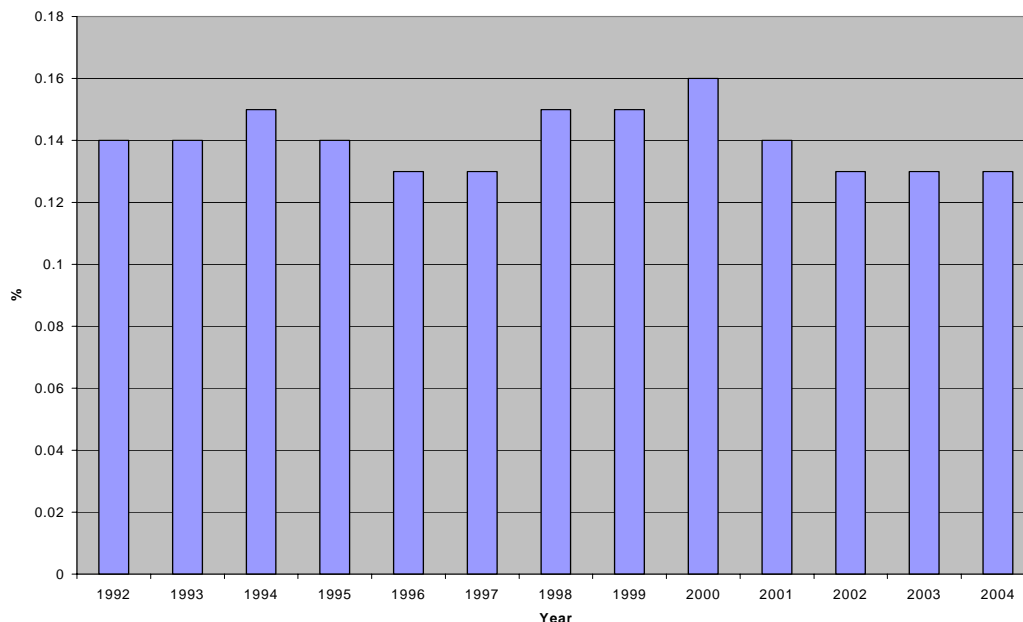
Table 1 - Ontario Governments

Year	Party	Leader	Popular Vote (%)	Seats
1981	Progressive Conservative	Bill Davis	44	70/125
1985	Progressive Conservative	Frank Miller	37	44/125
1985	Liberal/NDP Accord	David Peterson	38	48/125
1987	Liberal	David Peterson	47	95/130
1990	NDP	Bob Rae	38	74/130
1995	Progressive Conservative	Mike Harris	45	82/130
1999	Progressive Conservative	Mike Harris	45	59/103
2002	Progressive Conservative	Ernie Eves	45	59/103
2003	Liberal	Dalton McGuinty	46	72/103

Source: Dyck 1996, Dunn 1996, Drummond and MacDermid 1997, www.electionsontario.on.ca/results, www.canoe.ca/CNEWSOntarioElection/home.

⁶ For both provinces, anti-violence expenditures were only identified in the Provincial Public Accounts from the 1990s, on. In BC, those statistics were only present until 2001.

Graph 1 - Ontario VAW Expenditure as Percentage of Total Program Spending



Sources: Calculations made by the author from data drawn from Ontario Public Accounts 1992-2000.⁷

Table 2 – Ontario’s Anti-Violence Policies 1985-2005

Year – Party	Policy/Program	+/- Rating
1985 – PC	Provincial Committee of Deputies established to study family violence	+/-
- 1986 – Lib/NDP	Ontario Joint Family Violence Initiatives for a five-year term announced	+
1987 Liberals	\$7 million increase in family violence spending– includes first second stage funding	+/-
1987 – Liberal	New funding formula for sexual assault centres announced before consultation with OCRCC ended	-
1988 – Liberal	Interministerial Committee on Sexual Assault formed	+
1988 – Liberal	\$1.4 mil in new shelter funding announced along with changes to shelter funding formula – circumvented consultation with OAITH	-
1991 – NDP	10 new sexual assault centres and more funding for 21 existing centres – total increase of 250% under Ontario Sexual Assault Prevention Initiative	+
1991 – NDP	Attorney General directive to Crown Attorneys to fight attempts to make victims’ sexual history admissible at trial	+
1991 – NDP	\$12 mil spent on wife assault prevention and \$8.3 mil on sexual assault prevention added to \$66 mil current spending in both areas	+
1991 – NDP	\$4.6 mil spent to improve accessibility of battered women shelters and 42 new beds includes some core funding	+
1991 – NDP	\$3 mil to make campuses safer for women	+
1992 – NDP	<i>Women Killing: Intimate Femicide 1974-1990</i> released	+
1992 – NDP	Family law clinics set up to help increase access for women	+/-

⁷ Data reflect identifiable anti-violence expenditures, mainly in the Ministry of Community and Social Services. No data was available for 2005.

1992 – NDP	Additional \$11.5 mil to help prevent sexual assault	+
1992 – NDP	The <i>Limitations Act</i> was introduced	+
1993 – NDP	Integration of Wife Assault and Sexual Assault Prevention Initiatives into one Violence Against Women prevention strategy by 1994	+
1995 – PC	100% of Ministry and Community and Social Services funding for counselling services for second stage shelters, education and prevention services, for provincial anti-violence advertising campaign, for counselling of male batterers and for culturally specific services was eliminated	-
1995 – PC	Funding for interval houses and women’s shelters cut 2.5%	-
1996 – PC	Additional 5% cut to funding for interval houses and women’s shelters	-
1996 – PC	Framework for action on the prevention of violence against women in Ontario is released (the McGuire Report).	-
1997 – PC	Prevention of Violence Against Women: An Agenda for Action released with \$27 mil in new funding for Violence Prevention Initiatives	+/-
1997 – PC	<i>Woman Killing: Intimate Femicide in Ontario 1991-1994</i> released	+
1997 – PC	Two Domestic Violence Courts opened with plans for 6 more	+/-
1998 – PC	18-month pilot project announced to provide cell phones to women considered to be at high risk of being attacked	+/-
2000 – PC	Bill 117 Domestic Violence Protection Act introduced	+/-
2000 – PC	Funding to Ontario Women’s Centres is cut – Ottawa, North York, Windsor and Oakville	-
2000 – PC	\$5mil for programs for children who witness domestic violence	+/-
2000 – PC	\$5mil for transitional support programs for abused women and children	+/-
2000 – PC	\$50 mil for Victim Assistance including 300 “911” phones for domestic assault victims and increased electronic links between shelters, police and courts; increased number of Domestic Violence Courts	+/-
2001 – PC	Small funding increases to women’s centres to help abused women reach economic independence (does not replace funding cut in 2000).	+/-
2001 – PC	\$26mil over 4 years for shelter expansion, refurbishment, and building – part of larger 5-year \$20bil Super Build infrastructure initiative	+
2001 – PC	\$2.04 mil to programs to help non-English speaking women victims of violence	+
2001 – PC	\$3mil counselling service in shelters	+/-
2001 – PC	\$4.5mil over 5 years for a province-wide crisis help line	+
2002 – PC	\$21 mil to address domestic violence	+/-
2002 – PC	\$2.2 mil for cultural interpreter services for non-English speaking victims of domestic violence	+
2002 – PC	\$3mil research program for early assessment tool to help abused women through the Ontario Women’s Health Council	+/-
2004 - Liberal	\$1.6 mil to 18 community-based agencies to provide counselling and workshops for victims of sexual assault and violence	+
2004 – Liberal	\$60 mil Domestic Violence Action Plan announced including \$56mil over 5 years to improve functioning of existing shelters, increase capacity, train workers, etc.	+/-
2005 – Liberal	Small funding (\$161,050) for 55 projects in Northeastern Ontario for women and children victims of domestic violence	+/-

+, -, +/- ratings established by the author.

Note: **bold** denotes a major policy/program as indicated by anti-violence advocates.

Sources: Women’s Movement Archives, Walker 1990, OAITH 1996, Lightman and Baines 1996, OWJN 2000, Cairns 2000, Canadian Press NewsWire 2000, Community Action 2001, Canada NewsWire 2001 & 2002, The Daily Press 2001, Whitnall 2001, Crosby 2004, Della-Mattia 2004, Leslie 2004, Livingston 2004, Provincial government documents, Internal party documents.

Graph 1 illustrates the changes in Ontario government expenditure levels for anti-violence programs as a percentage of overall program expenditures between 1992 and

2004. The graph begins in 1992 because this is the first year that the province separated out anti-violence expenditures in the provincial public accounts. Table 2 illustrates the significant anti-violence program and policy announcements in Ontario between 1985 and 2005. Significant policies were determined through confidential interviews with advocates and state actors conducted by the author.⁸ These are rated as either positive toward child care advocates (+), negative (-), or mixed (+/-) based on these interviews. It also shows significant variation that does not always directly correspond to increases and decreases in provincial anti-violence expenditure percentages in Graph 1. In order to clarify these discrepancies, it is important to combine the information from both of the above sources.

The policy table shows large variation in anti-violence program and policy announcements over time. There is less variation in the expenditure graph indicating that much of the differences within and between parties on the anti-violence issue were hidden behind the expenditure percentages. Although expenditure statistics are unavailable during the mid-1980s, Table 2 suggests that spending increases were present, particularly near the end of the Tory dynasty in 1984-1985 when limited new funding was provided to transition houses and shelters. The Bill Davis government was the first administration in Ontario to recognize the violence against women problem and took some small, early steps to address it in the early 1980s. The PC party continued to study the problem and offered solutions such as programs for men who batter into the mid-1980s, but was not as progressive or responsive as advocates had hoped it would be.

Between 1985 and 1987 under the Liberal/NDP Accord,⁹ only one anti-violence initiative was announced, the positive and significant Ontario Joint Family Violence Initiatives. No other anti-violence policies were announced during the Accord years, which may in part be attributed to the absence of an anti-violence agenda in the written agreement between the Liberals and the NDP.

Attention to anti-violence issues increased under the Liberal majority government (1987-1990), but the only significant response during these three years was the mixed \$7 million increase in family violence spending, including new funding to wife assault initiatives and the first announcements of second-stage funding in the province (Walker 1990:203). Groups such as the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) and the Ontario Advisory Council on the Status of Women had campaigned strongly for affordable longer-term or second-stage housing for battered women, and were very pleased with that part of the funding announcement (OACWI 1992, Women's Movement Archives). But according to Gillian Walker, OAITH was critical of the wide range of "traditional agencies and institutions" that would receive provincial funding, which left only a small portion for feminist organizations (1990:15). Although specific expenditure statistics are unavailable for the years the Liberals held office, the 1987 increase in family violence spending was likely one of the biggest, if not the biggest, increase to date.

⁸ I also used historical advocacy and government data to compare demands over time, recognizing that advocates can be overly critical of state responses in order to maintain a strategic lobbying position vis a vis the state.

⁹ The Liberal and NDP parties signed a formal Accord after defeating the minority Tories shortly after the 1985 election. The Accord allowed the Liberals to govern for two years and the Liberals agreed to follow a written policy agreement with the NDP during this period.

Responses to activists improved dramatically once the centre-left, pro-feminist NDP assumed power in 1990. Five significant positive policy and program announcements were made during the Bob Rae years, including those that advocates consistently praised as being quite responsive to the movement, and none was negative.¹⁰ Among the most notable movement wins were large increases in sexual assault and wife assault prevention and shelter funding in 1991 and 1992. The former was particularly significant, since previous provincial governments had generally ignored the sexual assault issue. Graph 1 shows that anti-violence expenditure as a percentage of overall program spending increased between 1992 and 1994, despite the fact that the economy was suffering from a recession and the NDP posted a record budget deficit in 1992.

Like previous governments, the NDP tended to adopt a gender-neutral law and order approach to fighting the problem of violence against women, however, the government tempered this approach which represented a departure from other provincial regimes. For example, in 1991 the NDP attorney general directed crown attorneys to make every effort to fight attempts to bring up a victim's sexual history during sexual assault trials; this move was consistently praised by activists.

Eventually, NDP attention to anti-violence issues cooled somewhat during the party's final years in office as economic concerns took precedence. Table 2 shows that there were no new anti-violence policy announcements in 1994 and only one announcement in 1993, which was not significant. Even so, an overall look at policy evidence clearly demonstrates that the NDP government was the most committed to a pro-feminist agenda against violence in Ontario to date, despite broader neoliberal pressures. This was illustrated by the fact that no cuts to anti-violence programs occurred during a tough provincial recession.

When the right-wing Mike Harris Conservatives took power in 1995, government responses, not surprisingly, turned negative. Five negative responses were recorded during this period, including the first recorded cuts to anti-violence program funding.¹¹ These included significant cuts in 1995 to the entire Ministry of Community and Social Services budget for second-stage housing, education and prevention services, male batterer counselling programs and culturally specific anti-violence services. The Tories cut interval and women's shelter funding by 2.5% in 1995 and another 5% in 1996. Eileen Morrow of OAITH predicted that the cuts would have "deadly consequences. When you start shutting every door a woman might have opened for her to escape violence, she has no other option but to stay. There will be no place to go."¹²

Graph 1 shows that the anti-violence expenditure percentage decreased between 1995 and 1997, in all likelihood for the first time. Even though the economy was nearing the end of a tough recession, the targetting of anti-violence programs did not end up saving the province much money because the programs were not worth much in the first place. Graph 1 shows that cuts to anti-violence expenditures only saved the province .002% of overall program spending between 1994 and 1997. This indicates that the cuts were more symbolic and had much to do with the anti-feminist neo-liberal approach of the Harris Tories.

¹⁰ Activist interviews 2000-2002.

¹¹ Advocates cited these cuts as the most significant of our study period.

¹² Quoted in Lightman and Baines 1996:150.

In 1996, the Tories decided to re-examine anti-violence policy and drew up terms of reference for what they called the Framework for Action on the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Ontario (the McGuire Report). Increased publicity surrounding the issue of violence against women put it into sharper focus for the Tory government, but the movement was not invited to comment on the government's new anti-violence agenda. Advocates were particularly worried about the Report's view of women's shelters and rape crisis centres as helping to create a victim-centred dependency on services instead of empowering women (OAITH 1997: 2-3), and about its implied support for further cuts to services (OAITH 1997:3).

In 1998, the Chief Coroner of Ontario launched an inquest into the high profile murder of Arlene May by her male partner. The movement was pleased with the 213 recommendations released by the Inquest later that year, many of which echoed advocate demands, but the Tories largely ignored the report in the belief that their government was already implementing most of the Coroner's recommendations. This statement was made even when a prominent judge on the Inquest publicly stated that this was not the case (Canadian Press NewsWire, April 4, 2002).

In Graph 1, evidence shows that the Tories restored anti-violence expenditure around the same time as the May Inquest Report came out. The impetus to restore the funding levels was partly due to the high profile of violence against women in provincial media reports around the time of the 1998 inquest and into 2000. Early in 2000, three high-profile murders of women in the Toronto area occurred in just over a week's time.¹³

However, while the restoration of funding and increases particularly in 2000 were significant, the corresponding policy responses were not. Money was not directed to feminist anti-violence services, but instead to gender-neutral law and order programs. Thus feminist activists were still struggling to provide front-line anti-violence services, despite increased government anti-violence spending commitments. Bill 117, the Domestic Violence Protection Act introduced late in 2000, continued a law and order focus. However, the movement was initially pleased with the fact that the Act appeared to address some of the recommendations made by the May Inquest. Yet despite a speedy passage through the legislatures, the Tories dragged their heels on proclaiming and implementing the law well into 2002. This indicated that Bill 117 was more of a political response to the high profile nature of the anti-violence issue than a well-developed strategy to combat violence against women (OWJN 2002). At the same time, the Tories cut funding to five women's centres because they were offering second stage services to women who had already escaped violent homes (Canadian Press NewsWire, Oct. 2, 2000). The Tories did not believe the government should be supporting these types of services.

Graph 1 shows that although the Tories continued to spend new money on anti-violence programs, expenditures percentages actually shrunk between 2001 and 2003. New money was welcomed by advocates but the lack of attention to feminist demands continued. The only significant response during these years was a much needed increase of \$4.5mil to expand a province-wide 24 hour crisis helpline.

¹³ This prompted the Chief Coroner of Ontario to announce yet another inquest into one of the spousal murders – that of Gillian Hadley. The movement was baffled by the announcement arguing that the government still had not addressed the issues raised in the May Inquest. The OWJN called on all women's organizations to protest the decision (OWJN 2000).

When the Liberals replaced the Tories in 2003, there was room for improvement in state responsiveness levels to anti-violence movements, particularly in recognizing feminist expertise on the issue. However, even though the Liberals continued to increase spending and maintain the level of expenditure percentage, they failed to dramatically improve state openness to advocate demands. After a small increase in sexual assault and shelter funding in 2004, the Liberals announced a major \$60mil Domestic Violence Action Plan in 2005. Although the funding increase was welcomed, a continued focus on the gender neutral term “domestic” violence instead of violence against “women” was a disappointment to advocates who had higher expectations from the centrist government. More disturbing were comments made by Dalton McGuinty and Sandra Pupatello, the Minister Responsible for Women’s Issues, that shelters would receive one-time funding and then were expected to become “financially independent” – an untenable situation for shelters that were already struggling to raise funds to offset inadequate government funding (OWJN 2005).

In the end, we can see much diversity in Ontario government responses to anti-violence advocates between 1985 and 2005. While there was evidence of cuts and retrenchment of anti-violence programs during the Harris Tory years, all governments appeared willing to increase anti-violence expenditures which left expenditure percentages consistently between 0.13 and 0.22% of overall program expenditure between 1992 and 2004. Yet all of the most positive significant announcements (5) occurred under the left-of-centre NDP, which proved to be the most open to feminist anti-violence approaches. By contrast the Tories had 3 negative and 3 mixed significant policy announcements and only 1 that was rated positive. The Liberals were mixed in both of their significant responses to the movement at different time points during the study period. Thus, the evidence for Ontario did not show retrenchment convergence in anti-violence policy and variation in state responsiveness levels, for the most part, seemed to indicate that centre-left governments were more open to feminist demands than right-wing regimes, with centrist governments falling somewhere in-between.

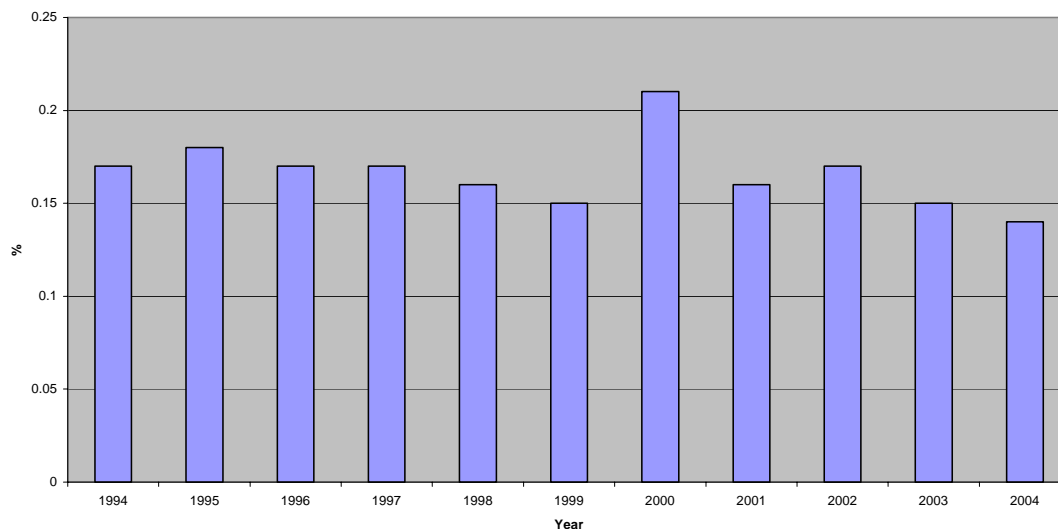
Anti-Violence Expenditure and Policy in BC

Table 3 – British Columbia Governments

Year	Party	Leader	Popular Vote (%)	Seats
1983	Social Credit	Bill Bennett	50	35/55
1986	Social Credit	Bill Vander Zalm	49	47/55
1991	Social Credit	Rita Johnston	49	47/55
1991	NDP	Mike Harcourt	40	51/75
1996	NDP	Glen Clark	39	39/75
2000	NDP	Ujjal Dosanjh	39	39/75
2001	Liberal	Gordon Campbell	57	77/79
2001	Liberal	Gordon Campbell	45	46/79

Source: Dyck 1996, Dunn 1996, Blake 1996b, www.elections.bc.ca/elections.

Graph 2 - BC VAW Expenditure as Percentage of Program Spending



Sources: Calculations made by the author from data drawn from British Columbia Public Accounts 1994–2004¹⁴.

Table 4 – British Columbia’s Anti-Violence Policies 1985-2005

Year – Party	Policy/Program	+/- Rating
- 1986 – Socred	Wife Assault Policy revised	+/-
1987 – Socred	Victims Assistance Programs announced including new funding for sexual assault programs	+/-
1990 – Socred	Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women established	+
1990 – Socred	\$3 mil interministry Sexual Abuse Interventions Project announced	+
1990 – Socred	25% budget increase to shelter funding to increase beds from 400 to 500	+
1991 – Socred	Task Force on Family Violence formed	+
1992 - NDP	<i>Is Anyone Listening? Report of the BC Task Force on Family Violence</i> released	+
1992 – NDP	BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance Programs established and funded by the province	+
1992 – NDP	Ministry of Women’s Equality is created by NDP and Stopping the Violence Initiative is announced including \$10 mil in new funding per year for next four years	+
1992 - NDP	BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses and Vancouver Transition House receive core funding	+
1992 – NDP	Services for Children Who Witness Violence Against Women	+

¹⁴ Data reflect identifiable anti-violence expenditures, mainly in the Ministry of Women’s Equality. After the MWE was eliminated in 2001, anti-violence expenditures were hidden within the Ministry of Citizenship, Aboriginal Peoples and Women. Data between 2001 and 2004 represent totals for *all* “women’s services” in MCAWS, as opposed to only anti-violence services. Data for 2004 also include “seniors services.” No data was available for 2005.

1992 – NDP	Increases in second stage housing funding	+
1992 – NDP	Increased aboriginal involvement in family violence solutions	+
1993 – NDP	Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy – third revision of Wife Assault Policy	+/-
1993 – NDP	Gender Equality Initiative announced by Ministries of Attorney General and MWE	+
1993 – NDP	Ministry of Social Services increases funding to transition houses and shelters by \$4 million	+
1993 – NDP	Korbin Commission of Public Enquiry	+
1994 – NDP	Limitation Amendment Act passed	+
1994 – NDP	\$1 mil to victims services	+
1994 – NDP	\$1 mil added to Men’s Treatment Program	+/-
1994 – NDP	\$1 mil to help address workload problems of sexual assault centres	+
1994 – NDP	\$2 mil to services and programs in Aboriginal communities to end family violence	+
1994 – NDP	2% wage increase for transition house staff and other anti-violence counselling agencies	+
1994 – NDP	\$1.78 mil increased transition house, safe house and second stage housing funding	+
1995 – NDP	First Prevention of Violence Against Women Week was proclaimed (April)	+
1995 – NDP	Central Registry of Protection Orders established	+
1995 – NDP	Victims of Crime Act passed	+
1996 – NDP	<i>A Safer Future for BC Women</i> program announced	+
1996 – NDP	VAWIR policy fourth revision	+/-
1996 – NDP	Provincial adoption of alternative measures/restorative justice in some instances of violence against women	-
1996 – NDP	Up to four new transition houses announced (one opened in 1997)	+
1998 – NDP	<i>Contributing to the Solution: A Symposium on Preventing Violence Against Women</i> is held	+
1999 – NDP	Live Violence Free – ten-year media campaign announced by MWE in partnership with BC Association of Broadcasters	+
1999 – NDP	Two new transition houses opened	+
1999 – NDP	911 pre-programmed cell phones available to women at risk in 9 BC communities	+/-
2000 – NDP	Ministry of Health releases <i>Violence Against Women: Improving the Health Care Response</i> guide	+
2001 – Liberal	MWE eliminated and incorporated into Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services	-
2001 – Liberal	40% cut to Legal Aid Program	-
2002 – Liberal	Abolition of independent Human Rights Commission	-
2002 – Liberal	Welfare benefits significantly reduced, time limits placed on ability to collect income assistance	-
2002 – Liberal	Core funding cut from Women’s Centres (by Mar 31/04)	-
2002 – Liberal	Provincial affordable housing funding ends and no new social housing announced	-
2002 – Liberal	50% cuts to programs for abusive men	-
2002 – Liberal	Court houses closed in 24 communities and cuts to criminal and family courts	-
2002 –	Cutr to 35/69 community based victim services including sexual	-

Liberal	assault and child abuse support services	
2003	Six offices of the “Stopping the Violence” and regional program branches closed, Safer Future grants eliminated along with training for front-line workers	-
2005 – Liberal	50% cut to grant for the British Columbia Institute against Family Violence (BCIFV)	-
2005 – Liberal	\$12.5mil funding increase for anti-violence services including \$5.1 mil to transition houses, \$2mil to expand “Stopping the Violence” and “Children Who Witness Abuse” counseling programs, \$1.6mil outreach and prevention programs, and \$2mil for new anti-violence measures.	+

+, -, +/- ratings established by the author. Note: **bold** denotes a major policy/program as indicated by anti-violence advocates and government insiders.

Sources: Women’s Movement Archives, provincial government documents, Walker 1990, Sigurdson 1996, Kachuk 1998, Leavitt 2002, Canada NewsWire 2003, BCIFV 2002 & 2005, BCCWC 2005, Creese and Strong-Boag 2005.

When we look at anti-violence policies and program expenditure levels in Graph 2, we see some similarities to data recorded for Ontario in Graph 1. Particularly, expenditure percentages did not fluctuate dramatically over time, as was the case in Ontario. However, anti-violence data were left off of the provincial public accounts in BC after the Liberals took office in 2001. The data listed between 2001 and 2004 in Graph 2 instead reflect expenditure percentages for all “women’s services” in the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services (the only indication available in the public accounts). The fact that this percentage represents a somewhat decreased amount compared to specifically “anti-violence” expenditure percentages in 2000 is very significant. The obvious cuts to anti-violence (and other women’s) programs are also supported by qualitative evidence in Table 4.

Just prior to our study period in 1984, the right-wing Social Credit Party under Bill Bennett introduced provincial policy covering wife assault. This policy was first announced in the 1984 BC submission to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Wife Abuse and was largely inspired by the working group as well as the fact that other provinces (such as Ontario) had already enacted a similar policy. The wife assault policy encouraged police forces and the justice system to treat domestic violence, particularly wife assault, more seriously and to lay more charges. However, this policy statement was not backed up with government action. Thus advocates charged that both the 1984 and 1986 revisions to the Wife Assault Policy were ineffective (Kachuk 1998:4).

New Socred leader, Bill Vander Zalm had a weak track record with advocates earlier when he held the Human Resources portfolio under Bill Bennett, but his desire to bolster Socred support among females in the electorate after he became leader and premier, led to two positive anti-violence announcements in the early 1990s. In 1990, the Socreds established the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women and announced a 25% budget increase in shelter funding; in 1991 they established the Task Force on Family Violence (Ministry of Government Management Services and Ministry Responsible for Women’s Programs 1991). Both were positive responses to the anti-violence movement after years of mainly inaction under the Bennett Socreds.

After the NDP took power in 1991, the Report of the BC Task Force on Family Violence¹⁵ made a series of pro-movement recommendations to be implemented over a three-year period. These included a directive to recognize and address sexist attitudes and values in society that underlie problems of violence against women.¹⁶ Most, if not all, of the recommendations in the report mirrored lobbying agendas within the movement at the time, and put the anti-violence issue on the political agenda. One activist noted:

I think the task force really focussed attention in a manner that made people sit up and take notice. It focussed public attention on the issue in a way that was [new].¹⁷

The NDP program and policy agenda that followed the task force shared a willingness to respond well to the recommendations in the report. The movement particularly welcomed the large 1992 increases in government funding of \$10 million per year over the next four years under the Stopping the Violence Initiative. The 1992 announcement of core funding for the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses as well as a reinstatement of core funding for the Vancouver Transition House¹⁸ was also praised by advocates recognizing the importance of the movement and its feminist expertise in the area. Increases to second stage funding in 1992 also reflected positive responses to key recommendations of the task force. Greater attention was also paid to the sexual assault sector in 1995, which had been largely ignored in the past, through the creation of the British Columbia Association of Specialized Victim Assistance Programs (BCASVAP).

The NDP revised the existing Wife Assault Policy in 1993, even though it continued the law and order approach that had prevailed under the Socreds. The new Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) Policy revision recognized that domestic violence is not exclusive to marriage and led to the change in name and focus from “wife assault” to “violence against women in relationships.”¹⁹ In 1994, the NDP announced a program to increase the wages of front-line anti-violence workers. As in Ontario, this move was welcomed by anti-violence advocates as a major gain. Table 4 shows that the pace of anti-violence policy improvements slowed somewhat between 1995 and 2000. While the majority of the NDP’s responses were positive (9), none of these was considered very significant by movement actors. Despite the lack of significant new programs, however, it is important to note that the MWE continued with existing programs established in the early 1990s that were positive toward the movement.

Graph 2 shows that anti-violence expenditure percentage marginally decreased between 1996 and 1999 under the Glen Clark NDP. However, in 2000, the Ujjal Dosanjh

¹⁵ The task force report was well-received by the movement except for a critique of the original terms of reference which meant the task force would look broadly at “family violence” instead of the more obvious problem of violence against women specifically (Report of the BC Task Force on Family Violence 1992:37).

¹⁶ As well, the report called for increased front-line services, better training for those offering the services, and better funding. It also called for “long-range prevention strategies,” particularly education in schools and the community along with better treatment for offenders. It dealt with the need for services to be sensitive and accessible to all sources of diversity in society, including better support for aboriginal communities to offer divergent solutions to the problems of family violence. Finally, the report called for recognition of the expertise of front-line workers and more co-ordination with community actors (Report of the BC Task Force on Family Violence 1992:1-2).

¹⁷ Confidential interview 2000.

¹⁸ Funding had been cut by the Bennett Socreds in the late 1970s.

¹⁹ See Kachuk (1998) for more on the VAWIR policy, including movement critiques.

NDP government increased expenditures to their highest levels since 1995. The increased expenditure does not coincide with significant new policies or programs in Table 4. It is important to note here as well that even at its height in 2000, anti-violence expenditure only made up slightly more than .2% of overall program spending, which was only .03% higher than levels in 1995. Likely fiscal pressures, including the fact that BC became a have-not province in 2000, had an impact on the NDP agenda, tempering progressive tendencies.

Yet, advocates saw the provincial government become much more negative in its approach to anti-violence policy after the election of the right-wing Gordon Campbell Liberals in 2001. All of the significant negative policy announcements in Table 4 occurred under this regime, including the first substantial cuts to anti-violence services in women's centres in 2002, cuts in legal aid in 2001 and cuts to welfare rates in 2002. The extent of the cuts prompted criticism from the United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in a submission titled "British Columbia Moves Backward on Women's Equality" (BCCWC 2003).

The closure of women's centres and cuts to the Stopping the Violence program, along with cuts to funds to train front-line workers were severely criticized by anti-violence and welfare advocates across the province. George Heyman, president of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union remarked that "If you're a woman fleeing a violent relationship and you need a safe house for you and your children, it's now a lot harder to get any support or assistance" (in Canada NewsWire, March 31, 2003). The cuts also spawned separate protests by the Victoria Status of Women Action Group and the BC Coalition of Women's Centres in 2001 and 2004, respectively (Expositor Dec. 7, 2001; BCCWC 2004). Yet these protests largely fell on deaf ears.

This lack of commitment to women's anti-violence policy was evident in Graph 2 in the decreased expenditure percentages recorded between 2001 and 2004 for all women's services. It was not until 2005 that the Liberals began to reinvest in anti-violence policy. Even so, the reinvestment was a modest increase in expenditure of \$12.5 million, including \$5.1 million for transition houses, \$2 million for the existing Stopping the Violence and the Children Who Witness Abuse counselling programs and \$1.6 million to expand outreach and violence prevention initiatives (MCAW 2005). Although the expenditures were welcomed by provincial advocates, they were not enough to restore much of what had previously been cut, including core funding for women's centres.

As with the Ontario example above, we saw evidence of significant anti-violence policy diversity in BC between different party governments. Specifically, evidence showed negative responses under the right-wing Liberals who embraced neo-liberal ideology and retrenchment of programs along with a gender-neutral approach to anti-violence issues. The latter position was typified by a 2001 suggestion by Liberal Attorney General Geoff Plant to rename the Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy the "Violence Against *People* in Relationships Policy," ostensibly in order to recognize that "women, too, can initiate violence" (O'Neill 2002:2). All of the significant negative policy announcements (4) were made under the Campbell Liberals, with only one modest positive announcement at the end of our study period.

In contrast, the centre-left NDP was more responsive to feminist anti-violence advocates in the 1990s and resisted neo-liberal retrenchment pressure into 2000, even during a tough provincial recession. Five significant positive policy announcements were made during the NDP years in office. This was the most positive period recorded between 1985 and 2005 for anti-violence policy and was recognized as such by provincial advocates. The VanderZalm Socreds, perhaps surprisingly, also appeared to be more open to anti-violence interests in the early 1990s instead of following neo-liberal retrenchment trends. The Socreds enacted two significant positive anti-violence programs during the study period. These decisions, however, were likely reflective of a more moderate right-wing approach precipitated by a desire to appeal to women voters in the run-up to a provincial election that the party was on the verge of losing.²⁰

Conclusion

In the end, the policy evidence presented above for both Ontario and BC raise more questions about welfare state retrenchment trends and demonstrate that while governments have appeared to embrace retrenchment at certain time points, overall they do not seem to be converging or growing more alike in their approaches to anti-violence policy. Therefore it is difficult to pronounce definitively on the overall impact of neo-liberalism on anti-violence policy in Ontario and BC because of this obvious variation in the extents to which each party government adopted or rejected neo-liberal practices between 1985 and 2005. Diversity was even present when we compare similar party governments at particular timepoints in Ontario and BC. For example, between 2001 and 2002, the right-wing Harris Tories in Ontario were increasing anti-violence expenditures and enacting new programs to combat violence against women. While these initiatives were prompted in part by media attention surrounding a number of high-profile murders and were not very responsive to feminist demands, they stood in stark contrast to the drastic cuts to anti-violence services, legal aid funding and welfare rates that were enacted by the right-wing Campbell Liberals in BC at the same point in time. Clearly, retrenchment convergence was not in evidence in this provincial comparison and neither was support for the claim that anti-violence policy was somehow “above retrenchment.”

This comparative example of the Harris Tories and the Campbell Liberals mentioned above indicates that party differences are in fact more nuanced than earlier indications in the paper that the left is always positive in its anti-violence policies and that the right is always negative in its approaches to anti-violence.²¹ However, overall evidence from these two provincial cases generally demonstrates that left-wing regimes were consistently more responsive to feminist movements and were more willing to accept feminist critiques and solutions to violence against women. In contrast, right-wing regimes were consistently less open to feminist approaches to anti-violence policy, even when these regimes demonstrated a willingness to increase anti-violence expenditures. This study reaffirms a need to look beyond aggregate expenditure statistics to accurately determine the presence or absence of policy convergence. Clearly qualitative assessments of state anti-violence policy responses to feminist women’s movements lead

²⁰ I discuss the impact of electoral factors on partisan differences in my larger dissertation. See Collier 2006.

²¹ I discuss this nuanced impact of the partisan variable in more detail in the larger dissertation. See *ibid.*

us to seriously question the presence of anti-violence policy convergence and raises questions about the presence of supposed welfare state convergence more broadly.

While the comparative scope of this paper is limited, it does lend more support to partisan theory of public policy explanations than convergence theories. It also suggests that the impact of neo-liberalism on women's anti-violence policy is not straight forward. While evidence above supports the notion raised by Teghtsoonian that neo-liberalism has the potential to mute social democratic tendencies of left-wing governments, we also see that this is not always the case. Similarly, while neo-liberalism can push right-wing governments to be less responsive to anti-violence advocacy demands, evidence above demonstrated times when right-wing governments, notably the Vander Zalm Soereds in BC, were not closed to these voices. In the end, not all of the questions raised at the beginning of this paper can be answered definitively here. However, this study raises important reservations about some of the assumptions in the comparative women and politics literature on the impact of welfare state retrenchment and neo-liberalism. These deserve further research to help us better understand how both neo-liberalism and welfare state retrenchment impact women's policy and their lives in Canada and beyond.

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