

# Getting young adults to recognize the warning signs for partner violence

*Researcher concerned too many miss the signals*

June 2, 2013, Victoria – A University of Calgary researcher is about to undertake research she hopes will uncover better ways for young adults to recognize – and prevent – domestic partner violence.

Lynn Corcoran is a registered nurse and a doctoral student in educational research. She will be explaining her project at the 2013 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Corcoran had initially hoped to look for better ways for nurses to screen people for the potential for violent behaviour. But a horrific shooting in Alberta two years ago changed the direction of her research.

In December, 2011, a young man named Derek Jensen shot and killed Tabitha Stepple, a former girlfriend, and two young athletes on a highway near Claresholm, Alta., before killing himself. Another young woman was seriously wounded.

His friends described Jensen as a nice guy and were stunned by what had happened.

But Corcoran, who worked for five years in a shelter with young men who had been involved in violence, said Jensen exhibited all the warning signs: He was a hunter, he had access to weapons, he had obsessively texted Stepple and he had threatened her.

“If I had been doing a risk assessment on him, he would have been off the chart!” she said. Yet no one around Jensen, she said, clued in to the potential for violence.

What Corcoran wants to do is help figure out the best way to get young adults – roughly aged 18 to 25 – to see and respond to the warning signs for violence.

There are several challenges, she explained.

One is that young adults don’t have enough life experience to recognize a bad relationship. They don’t know what’s normal, she said.

Another issue is that relationships can slide from healthy to unhealthy, and from unhealthy to violent, so gradually that warning lights don’t go off. “Women’s perception of danger can get skewed,” she said.

Corcoran says that despite public education programs and policies on bullying and intimate partner violence, the rate of murder in intimate partner relationships in Canada remains relatively unchanged.

She hopes her work will find better ways to reach the 18-to-25-year-old set – perhaps by informing the development of the curriculum in high schools, or by finding how best to create

targeted ads on TV or online, or by giving the people who create public policy better information.

“We need to do something different if young adults are going to pay attention,” she said.

-30-

**For more information, story ideas or to schedule an interview, please contact:**

Laura Markle  
Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
613-282-3489  
[lmarkle@ideas-idees.ca](mailto:lmarkle@ideas-idees.ca)

Mélanie Béchard  
Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
613-894-7635  
[mbechard@ideas-idees.ca](mailto:mbechard@ideas-idees.ca)

**About the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences**

Organized by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Congress is the largest interdisciplinary conference in Canada. Described as a “conference of conferences,” Congress involves nearly 70 academic associations that represent a rich spectrum of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including literature, history, theatre, film studies, education, music, sociology, geography, social work and many others.