

Conference

Key issues for the clinical assessment of intimate partner violence with a couple and clinical options addressing this phenomenon including attachment-based interventions

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About the speaker

Dr. Marie-France Lafontaine is a full professor of psychology at the University of Ottawa and a licence psychologist. She is the director of the Couple Research Laboratory. She conducts scientific research on the topic of relationships, teaches various courses at the doctoral / bachelor levels, offers clinical supervision and psychological services to adults and couples. She is a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario and the *l'Ordre des psychologues du Québec*.

Abstract

Intimate partner violence has a pernicious effect on the entire family system, making it a very relevant target for both researchers and clinicians. This presentation will aim to provide diagnostic tools to identify the nature and effects of violent acts on couples. Specifically, the information to be collected during the course of the couple evaluation will be presented. Among this information are the various correlates of psychological and physical violence highlighted by research, including mine. A decision model for the choice of couple therapy will also be exposed. Clinical options in the presence of intimate partner violence, as well as the pros and cons of couple therapy in the presence of dangerous violence will be discussed. I will conclude by presenting a form of couple therapy that resonates the most with my understanding of couple relationships. It is Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), which has among its foundations, the attachment theory; theory that is central to my research. Intimate partner violence is understood as part of a problematic relational dynamic in which non-optimal strategies of emotional regulation reinforce distress, negative visions of oneself and others. The clinician then helps the couple to see the aggressive behaviors as an attempt to connect to the other that is not working, resulting in a greater distance instead of the desired emotional connection and feeling of security.

Summary of themes covered

- Introduction
- The evaluation process
- Information to be collected during the course of the evaluation
- Results of the evaluation
- Decision model for choosing couple therapy or not
- Advantages and disadvantages of couple therapy in the presence of physical violence
- Clinical options in the presence of domestic violence including attachment-based interventions
- History of EFT with couples: Synthesis of experiential and systemic perspectives and the influences of the theory of attachment. Strategies and cycles of emotional regulation. Emotions. Key principles of EFT with couples. Change process: the three stages / nine stages. Central interventions: Those aimed at exploring and reformulating emotion and those aimed at restructuring. Cons-indications. Challenges of the novice speaker, weather permitting