



## WOMEN'S HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING SPEAKERS SERIES

Fall 2008- Winter/Spring 2009  
Organizer: Dr. Nazilla Khanlou  
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### SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

<b>Date Name, affiliation of presenter, and title of presentation</b>	<b>Summary of presentation</b>
<p><b>October 8, 2008</b></p> <p><b>Professor Pat Armstrong,</b> Department of Sociology, York University CHSFR/CIHR Chair in Health Services &amp; Nursing Research</p> <p><b>The mental health of health care workers - A woman's issue?</b></p>	<p>Dr. Armstrong discussed employment in the health care sector as a determinant of mental health, with particular attention on women in these jobs. She highlighted the fact that there is still great stigma attached to mental illness and that because care is considered a 'women's issue', little is done to protect women, or to support them in terms of negative mental health outcomes associated with these jobs. Within a feminist political-economy approach, she also discussed the ways in which unpaid and informal care work in the private sphere is forgotten, which leaves women particularly vulnerable to mental health problems in those situations.</p>
<p><b>November 5, 2008</b></p> <p><b>Professor Nancy Johnston</b> School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University</p> <p><b>Reconstructing meaning amidst adversity: Women's stories of resilience</b></p>	<p>Professor Nancy Johnston and her team of researchers from Black Creek Community Health Centre and Whitby Mental Health Centre set out to explore how women reconstruct meaning amidst overwhelming circumstances. Dr. Johnston's aim was to explore the resources that some women call upon to sustain hope when life takes unexpected turns and to understand the experiences that inspired a return toward a sense of meaning and direction. Drawing from feminist thought as well as existential philosophy and hermeneutical phenomenology, Dr. Johnston and her team explored the personal narratives of eleven women and two men by engaging participants through focus groups and individual interviews. Dr. Johnston presented three of the stories that emerged during their research. While each story is unique in circumstance, all are tied together by one common theme of finding strength in moments of sorrow and gaining resilience to overcome adversity. Dr. Johnston's approach to this study was especially unique in that the participants were not considered or treated as random subjects of a study, but people sharing their personal feelings and</p>

	<p>experiences. Dr. Johnston and her team responded to these candid narratives by constructing feedback poetry for each participant. The poems, which were shared as a part of the presentation, are a poignant token of thanks that served to illuminate the new found strength of each individual.</p>
<p><b>February 11, 2009</b></p> <p><b>Professor Dayna Nadine Scott</b> Osgoode Hall Law School &amp; Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University</p> <p><b>Living with chronic pollution: implications for women's health</b></p>	<p>Professor Scott's discussion shed light on the myriad risks that chronic pollution has on communities and individuals and the way in which chronic pollution impacts women's reproductive health. In examining the risks of chronic pollution, Professor Scott emphasized the dangers posed by continuous or recurrent exposure to legally sanctioned doses of industrial chemicals and contaminants found in the air, water and food. She discussed some of the methods used to detect toxins in the body and some of the key movements and campaigns that have formed in response to the risks posed by environmental toxins. Professor Scott noted that the quality of air and water tells us a great deal about contemporary pollution and suggested that one of the dangers with continuous exposure to low doses of pollutants is that it is difficult to link health related outcomes to a specific toxin especially in geographical areas that are highly industrial. Professor Scott shared the experience that residents of Aamjiwnaang, an Ontario reserve, had with chronic industrial pollution and the ongoing challenges they face in working with government officials to address their environmental concerns.</p> <p>Further information can be found at the following sites:  <a href="http://www.mirec-canada.ca/site/index.php">http://www.mirec-canada.ca/site/index.php</a>  <a href="http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/publications/lead/summarytable.php">http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/publications/lead/summarytable.php</a></p>
<p><b>March 11, 2009</b></p> <p><b>Professor Denise Gastaldo</b> Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto CIHR New Investigator</p> <p><b>Hoping Things will Improve: Recent migrant women's experience in Toronto</b></p>	<p>Dr. Gastaldo and her team of researchers conducted a qualitative participatory action study that sought to uncover the experience of skilled workers who immigrated to Canada. Conducted over a period of ten months, Dr. Gastaldo and her team recruited 33 migrant women who left their countries in search of safety and peace and with hopes for personal development and professional opportunity. Her research was grounded in critical social theory and the notion of hope as a coping strategy and ontological need and revealed that some of the primary social determinants of mental health issues among immigrant women stemmed from acute awareness of their diminished socio-economic status as immigrants. Despite arriving in Canada with skills, experience and education, 37 percent of immigrants live in poverty for the first five years. This figure reduces only slightly to 28 percent beyond five years. Dr. Gastaldo's research also revealed that language barriers, differences in opportunity based on gender combined with one's inability to seek paid employment serves to generate feelings of displacement, which often results in chronic stress and depression. Dr. Gastaldo suggested that approaching the mental health issues that</p>

	<p>many immigrant women endure through a biomedical lens is inadequate to addressing the larger social issues from which they emerge. Accordingly, Dr. Gastaldo emphasized the importance in politicizing everyday issues in order to address systemic problems in an effort to uncover strategies for change and empowerment.</p> <p>Further information can be found at:  <a href="http://www.immigrationguide.nursing.utoronto.ca">www.immigrationguide.nursing.utoronto.ca</a></p>
<p><b>May 13, 2009</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Usha George</b>  Dean, Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University</p> <p><b>Immigrant women's health and wellbeing in the context of resettlement</b></p>	<p>Dr. Usha George discussed the findings of a longitudinal survey on immigrant healthcare that involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. She noted at the outset that the importance of studying immigrant healthcare is to aid in the process of developing immigration policies. The study revealed that the healthy immigrant effect diminishes over time due to a combination of factors. Dr. George pointed out that the decline in immigrant health can be attributed to lifestyles changes, which may include altered eating habits, such as diet, and, in some cases, an increase in alcohol consumption and/or tobacco use. In addition to life style changes, the study revealed that socio-economic, cultural and gender differences played a significant role in the decline in immigrant health. Dr. George noted, for example, that issues pertaining to the lack of employment opportunities and poverty had a substantial impact on immigrant mental health. Dr. George also highlighted that, for many immigrants, cultural practices clashed with the Canadian medical system. Moreover, healthcare was found to be largely inaccessible due to a shortage of physicians and the lack of health insurance available to immigrants.</p>