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Faculty Profile: Beverly Lovett

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Faculty Profile

Beverly Lovett

Professor Beverly Lovett of the Social Work Department has brought her enduring concern with child welfare to campus in numerous vital ways, such as her research, teaching and training initiatives. Her interest in child welfare dates back to her undergraduate days at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she majored in Family Studies, going on to complete her Master's at Simmons College and her doctorate at Tulane University, both in the field of social work. For her doctoral dissertation she focused on issues in children's mental health, and the problem of child abuse, as predicaments that urgently require practical solutions as well as theoretical approaches to support non-offending mothers in child sexual abuse. She oversaw a grant for which she worked with children in an intervention program at Children's Hospital, New Orleans. In complementary work she collected data regarding the various family dynamics surrounding child abuse situations.

Through her research and clinical work, Professor Lovett came to the realization that analyses of child abuse as a social problem are often damagingly skewed against mothers. Both popular media such as television and movies and more rarefied venues such as scholarly journals frequently position the mother as a passive but knowing “accomplice” to the father’s abusive behavior. This representation, which possibly stems from the same quasi-conscious misogyny that underlies so many media images of women, is both negative and fallacious.

Professor Lovett believes that this reductive assessment must be rejected in favor of more complex and subtle evaluations. This reversal of harmful trends in social work thinking and practice forms the core of her own work. Rather than blame the mother, she contends, social workers and researchers must question all commonplace assumptions about child abuse and family dynamics. For instance, it is unfortunately the case that many mothers are not able to recognize signs of abuse, and must be taught to do so and seek appropriate help. Further, the mother’s family history should be examined more closely as factors that inevitably impinge upon her interaction with her own family. If a mother has a family history of abuse, or is dependent financially and/or emotionally on her husband, or issues from a cultural environment where patriarchal values support male preeminence (e.g., women and children are devalued), these factors will all determine how the mother operates vis-a-vis her family. Professor Lovett published her findings in a paper for the *International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect*.

Here on campus, Professor Lovett and the Social Work Department have won a federal grant to oversee a project of which she is Co-Principal Investigator, the Child Welfare Training Grant. She is responsible for coordinating internships that train BSC students in protective child services, particularly in neglected cultural and linguistic sectors here in southeastern Massachusetts. She recruits and trains students interested in child welfare to work in Haitian-Creole, Cape Verdean, Spanish, African American, and Portuguese communities since there is a need for social workers who are competent in child welfare practice and who are culturally competent as well. The students perform field work and learn to assess family situations and histories. They are trained to assess the family environment and to provide services to strengthen the family when possible.

Professor Lovett also familiarizes her students with the spectrum of services available to troubled families. She points out that many jobs are now opening in the field of child welfare services as well as gerontological services. When asked about funding for her campus project, she explained that the grants from the Department of Health and Human Services, which funds many other such projects, might well be eliminated if the tax cuts currently being proposed to President Clinton by Republican advocates are passed. Let’s hope that Professor Lovett is able to continue with the research and training programs that have blazed such important trails here at BSC, in the region, and in the field of social work.