TCCR Conference - Thinking Relationally about Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse

This important conference held at TCCR on 20th June 2014 addressed the question as to whether current approaches to working with domestic violence needed to shift to a stronger focus on relationships. Dr Samantha Callan, Associate Director for Families and Mental Health Centre for Social Justice, spoke to the key findings contained in her report ‘Beyond Justice’, and this was followed by Professor Michael Johnson, Emeritus Professor of Sociology who presented his research relating to typologies of violence and abuse. Given that Professor Johnson’s key message is that not all violence is the same, we were then able to think about the kinds of couples where couple therapy can be undertaken safely and effectively. TCCR staff, Julie Humphries and Dr Damian McCann spoke about the work that TCCR does with violent relationships, presenting a theoretical framework for understanding violence that is bi-directional and assessed as being linked to some of the difficulties that the couple are facing. They discussed how to establish safe parameters within the therapeutic setting that can help the couple work through their difficulties. Dr Jessica Yakely, from The Portman Clinic developed this thinking in terms of highlighting the importance of attachment patterns and how work with violence must focus on helping people to reflect on feelings rather than act on them. Professor Leon Feinstein, Director of Evidence, Early Intervention Foundation, drew our attention to the need to intervene early to prevent couples from getting into more serious difficulties and he also raised important questions concerning the cost of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and abuse on the couple, the family and indeed society as a whole.