

# Reconceptualizing community in CSWB

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I am excited and honoured to join the Contributing Editor Community (CEC) for the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-being* (JCSWB). By way of introduction, I am writing to you from the Canadian Prairies specifically, Treaty 6 Territory, where I live and work as a clinical forensic psychologist and associate professor. The move to fulltime academia is a fairly new development for me. After working as part of multidisciplinary community safety teams as a registered psychologist (primarily providing assessment and treatment services to adults and youth with histories of violence) for many years, while also engaging in applied research as an adjunct professor, a golden opportunity to further develop my research program and train the next generation of clinical psychologists presented itself.

I returned to academia with high hopes to prepare clinical psychology graduate students for the realities of forensic community practice and moreover, to support them in practising to scope, beyond the traditional roles for psychologists, to promote community safety and well-being (CSWB). Immediately prior to returning, I worked for over a decade as the first operational psychologist within a municipal police agency. The aspirational intent of this position was to provide clinical and behavioural science expertise/knowledge to the design, implementation, and evaluation of police and integrated community practices to decrease crime with the goal of increasing community safety, and was envisioned by some of the founding members of the JCSWB. The opportunity to develop this innovative role, within the context of the “social innovations and collaborative models in CSWB” that has been emerging in Saskatchewan since 2010 (Taylor, 2016, p. 2), profoundly shaped my thinking and my practice.

So, with this unique constellation of experiences (and biases) in mind, and having just read the editorial on the “unkindness of ravens” penned by the editor-in-chief of JCSWB (Taylor, 2025, p. 177), I began to contemplate what to write in this editorial. I found myself reflecting on the experiences mentioned above and the centrality of community to my own practice, the journal, its contributors, and community safety partners. This, in turn, prompted me to reflect on how we define the “community” in CSWB and what this means.

I began by searching early writings that started to define CSWB. In a series of papers titled “Community Safety and Well-being: Concept Practice and Alignment,” Nilson (2018) expands upon early definitions and defined CSWB conceptually as “targeted, aggregate result of our broader human

services system that is achieved through collaborative generation of pragmatic solutions, evidenced based interventions, and shared community outcomes. It is the state at which the composite needs of a community’s collective safety and well-being are achieved” (p. 98). Definitions such as these have undoubtedly served to stimulate further discussion and development of the CSWB concept over the years (Nilson, 2018) – especially the safety and well-being components – but have largely remained silent on how community is, could, or ought to be defined.

This observation reminded me of a series of presentations and conference proceedings from the early 2000s on the evidence-based principles of assessment and treatment for offenders – the Risk, Need, and Responsivity Model (or RNR) – where Responsivity was described as the “other principle” (e.g., Kennedy, 2000). At the time, and perhaps even now, the responsivity principle was understudied relative to the other two principles. Specific responsivity involves tailoring evidence-based interventions designed to address areas of criminogenic risk-need to individual characteristics (e.g., level of motivation, cognitive ability, mental wellness), including social identity, cultural, and community factors (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). These calls to action, along with other unforeseen developments (e.g., legal challenges), prompted practitioners and researchers alike to pay greater attention to responsivity factors (e.g., risk assessment with Indigenous persons).

Some have since argued that social capital, or the capacity to draw upon personal ties or social networks to access resources and advance personal interests, continues to be a neglected responsivity factor (Koetzle & Matthews, 2020). Individuals have social capital and so do communities. The paradigm shift from traditional models of crime prevention to CSWB does include shared problem ownership, multisector collaboration, and community mobilization (Nilson, 2018). However, *who* is identifying the problem and the collaborators, and/or the community to be mobilized?

Put simply, community and the rules of community engagement are often defined by the majority. Most commonly, this takes a descriptive form (e.g., space, place). Common definitions include a group of people “who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations of settings” (MacQueen et al., 2001, p. 1936). However, the “ravens” identified by the editor-in-chief of JCSWB require us to adopt a

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stronger focus on relational component to our concept of community including, the “relations among members of the community, as well as between individual members and the community as a whole” (Neely, 2012, p. 4). Neely (2012) also reminds us that what these relations are may vary, and we may not even be aware that we are part of a community or the impacts this may have.

We do know that marginalized individuals and communities often experience systemic, intersectional traumas and oppressions (e.g., historic oppression, individual internalizations, interpersonally mediated interactions; Felipe et al., 2023) that may further alienate them from community. Western approaches to CSWB and these “ways of knowing” may not resonate with these individuals and groups, and their voices may remain unheard. Thus, it is critical that we continue working to understand intersecting and overlapping identities, and how these relate to inclusion and community. For instance, how do these communities wish to be engaged and what are the ethical expectations of engagement (Sariola, 2020)? Such questions can be extended to online communities as well.

Consider for a moment the online communities that you interact with. How many of these could be considered depersonalized spaces, digital silos, or “echo chambers” populated with like-minded others (e.g., education, profession, political beliefs)? Although many important benefits can be derived from participation in digital communities (e.g., communication of information, social interaction), broadening the types of information we consume and the types of communities we connect to in mindful ways, online and otherwise, is critically important to promote understanding of diverse viewpoints and combat hate and disinformation. For instance, the results of a recent content analysis of online statements conducted by Hameleers and colleagues (2022) do support an association between false information and incivility – one of the “ravens” identified by the *JCSWB* editor-in-chief.

On the flip side, the research of Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) at the University of British Columbia, and quite possibly our own collective experiences during the pandemic, have taught us that even “weak” social ties or “relationships having less frequent contact, low emotional intensity, and limited intimacy” (p.910) with folks like your neighbourhood barista, grocery store cashier, and other acquaintances can contribute to greater subjective feelings of well-being and belonging. The significant impact of these “weak ties” encourages us to continue working to expand our own community networks beyond our “stronger ties” (e.g., family, friends). Such efforts may not only impact our own happiness, but could help to further inoculate us from the unkindness of ravens (Taylor, 2025).

Thus, a renewed focus on how we define and engage diverse, hidden, and neglected relational communities in CSWB and how we engage in community-based research, scholarship, and practice may promote responsivity, inclusivity, and social connectedness and guard against the “ravens” of our times (e.g., Taylor, 2025). To take on this work effectively and ethically, we must do more than appeal to the “better angels of our nature.” There is a growing need to strengthen and apply best-practice frameworks for ethical decision-making in CSWB (e.g., Stockdale & Rector, 2024). Such frameworks will become increasingly important as

we seek to navigate the ethical complexities associated with rapidly emerging technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence) and global social-political shifts/changes (e.g., conflict associated with climate change).

Positive, aspirational approaches to ethics, beyond the ethical floor, are also needed to assist us in navigating the “increasingly cruel, unkind, and misinformed currents that threaten human security” (Taylor, 2025, p. 178) in ways that promote professionalism, human rights, and social justice, and protect vulnerable persons, peoples, and communities. The shared CSWB problems we are working on amidst rising currents and countercurrents, often have limited resources, shared emotional connections, mutual passion, and/or desire to influence. As such, self-care practices are best viewed as an ethical imperative. How we practice self-care also needs to extend beyond our typical individual practices to incorporate reflexive practices (e.g., self-awareness of personal biases, stressors, and pressures; self-reflection) and a communitarian commitment to care for one another (Johnson et al., 2013).

Reconceptualizing community and adopting a communitarian approach to CSWB can not only promote safety and well-being but also flourishing communities.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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