

**FEDERAL STRATEGY ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
BRIEFING NOTES FOR STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA AND THE DEPARTMENT
OF JUSTICE CANADA**

ISSUE: Critical Elements of an Effective Response to Gender-Based Violence

Introduction to Briefing Documents

Gender-based violence – both domestic violence and sexual violence – continues to undermine the safety of women and their children across Canada.

Domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA) are increasing, despite repeated statements in the media about an overall decline in violent crimes reported to police across Canada. Police-report statistics are limited to only those criminal incidents that are reported to police. The General Social Survey (GSS) however, conducted by Statistics Canada, complement police-reported data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey by providing information on self-reported incidents of victimization that are both reported and unreported to police. According to the UCR Survey, the police-reported violent crime rate declined in 2012, down 3% from 2011, to its lowest level since 1987. However, when DV and SA are disaggregated from police-reported violent crime and compared to self-reported victimization rates and other data, it can be seen that these crimes remain at consistently high levels or are actually increasing.

In 2009, 46,918 incidents of DV cases were reported to police in Canada, representing 11% of all police-reported violent crime in Canada (Zhang et al 2012). This represents an increase from an estimated 45,973 incidents in 2004 (Johnson 2006). In addition, GSS data indicates that nationally, the rate of police reporting of DV to police has dropped from 28% of cases reported in 2004 to only 22% in 2009 (McInturff 2013). If these reporting rates are applied to police reported data, it can be estimated that incidents of domestic violence have actually risen from 164,189 in 2004 to 213,264 in 2009.

Nationally, rates of self-reported SA have increased from just over half a million in 1999 (or 2.1% of the adult population) to 677,000 incidents (or 2.4% of the adult population) in 2009 (McInturff 2013).

The costs of gender-based violence

The social and economic costs of gender-based violence in Canada are difficult to measure with any degree of accuracy but are, by all accounts, enormous.

Gender-based violence has significant – often overwhelming – impacts on its victims, both on the women and on the children who witness or are exposed to the violence, or who experience the profound disturbance such violence has on family life. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common effect of gender-based violence, carrying with it serious disruptions of daily life and employment and serious negative impacts on health and overall well-being.

Statistics Canada (2007) points out that almost 40% of women who were victims of domestic violence said that their children witnessed/were exposed to the violence. Much of this violence was severe, and in half the incidents the mother feared for her life. There is strong research evidence that the impact on children of witnessing or being exposed to violence against their mothers is profound. It can persist throughout children's lives. It can impact their emotional development, resulting in school difficulties and serious behaviour problems, and in a greater likelihood of boys becoming abusers and of girls becoming victims.

In terms of financial costs, two 1995 studies, while undoubtedly significantly underestimating 2007 costs, nevertheless provide some figures for the financial impact of violence against women. Day (1995) estimated the measurable cost impact of violence against women in Canada on health and well-being to be \$1.5 billion annually. Greaves et al (1995) estimated partial costs for criminal justice, health and social services, education and labour/employment to be \$4.2 billion annually. A 1996 BC study estimated partial costs of violence against women at an annual figure of \$385 million, rising to an annual figure of \$1 billion if the costs of health care, court, services for children and the effects of intergenerational violence are taken into account.

Statistics Canada (2007) states that "studies of the economic costs of violence against women to victims and society estimate that costs to health, criminal justice, social services and lost productivity range in the billions of dollars." "The trickle-down effects of the impact of gender-based violence on already overloaded social and health services are significant for all users of those systems and for the overall economy" (Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, forthcoming). As Yodanis et al noted in their international review of studies of the costs of violence (2000), it is *violence* that incurs the costs, thus economic studies reflect the cost of not assisting victims and of allowing gender-based violence to continue.

Victim/survivor support services

A range of specialized community victim support services has been funded since the early 1970s. Currently these include Sexual Assault Centres, Community-Based Victim Services, Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs; Outreach Programs, Multicultural Outreach Programs, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs, Transition Houses, Safe Homes, Second Stage Housing, and system-based victims services such as those attached to police and Crown.

Throughout these *Briefing Documents*, the term "victim/survivor support services" refers to this range of specialized services.

Focus of these *Briefing Documents*

The focus of these *Briefing Documents* is gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence. As women who are victims of violence often have dependent children, children are included where their safety is also an issue. It is widely accepted that domestic and sexual assault are gender-based crimes (Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group 2003, R. v. Osolin [1993]). However, while the focus of these documents is women and their children, this emphasis is not intended to minimize the impact of domestic and sexual violence on men.

The dynamics of power-based crimes

Domestic and sexual violence are power-based crimes. Power-based crimes occur where there is some form of power imbalance, when offenders impose power or abuse power they have over victims, and victims feel powerless to stop them. Abusers usually have a sense of entitlement in relation to their victims that enables them to justify their behaviour. This sense of entitlement may be based on gender, age, social position, or the nature of the relationship. Issues related to gender, age, race, culture, poverty, ability and/or sexual orientation combine with abuse of power to produce power-based crimes.

Addressing the needs of populations marginalized by society

All women are vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence, suffer short-term and long-term effects from such violence, and experience needs arising from their victimization. However, women who are marginalized by culture, race, colour, gender identity, immigration status, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or social or geographic isolation may be particularly vulnerable to violence, and especially to serious violence, and may find it more difficult to access services. Furthermore, the impact of domestic or sexual violence on women marginalized by society will be shaped by their particular perspectives and experiences. The needs of these women may be broader and more extreme than those of “mainstream” women, and the interventions they require will in turn be shaped by these needs.

Critical elements of an effective response to gender-based violence

Critical elements of an effective response to gender-based violence are addressed in the *Final Report of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation (2003)*. Critical elements included in this important report include thorough investigation, high level of victim support, expedited cases and a coordinated response.

Any approach to gender-based violence must address the diversity of communities and issues. Rather than adopting a specific model, like the *F-P-T Report*, these *Briefing Documents* identify critical elements of an effective response to GBV. These elements can serve as the foundation for a national strategy and action to address gender-based violence. The following *Briefing Documents* summarize these critical elements:

1. Critical Elements of an Effective Response to Gender-Based Violence
2. Addressing Gaps in Services for Marginalized Women
3. Specialized Support for Women Who are Victims of Violence
4. Coordination and Information Sharing
5. Effective Referrals to Community-Based Victim Services
6. Addressing Sexual Assault
7. Barriers to Women’s Participation in the Criminal Justice Process
8. Effective Enforcement of Protection Orders
9. Treatment for Assaultive Men

10. Establishment of a Domestic Violence Death Review Committee
11. Training on Gender-Based Violence
12. Prevention of Gender-Based Violence
13. Disaster Preparedness and Support
14. Anti-Violence Worker Safety

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