



BC Association of  
Specialized Victim  
Assistance &  
Counselling Programs



B.C./Yukon  
Society of Transition  
Houses



BC Institute  
Against Family Violence

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### *Introduction to Briefing Documents*

Violence against women – both domestic violence and sexual violence – continues to pose enormous threats to the safety of women and their children across Canada and in BC.

In 1995 Sharon Velisek was shot by her estranged husband in Vernon, BC. Also in Vernon, in 1996, nine members of the Gakhal and Saran families were murdered by the estranged husband of Rajwar Gakhal. Since that time, a number of other highly publicized deaths or serious injuries have occurred in the context of domestic violence in BC. In 2002, Tammy Lynn Miller was killed by her husband in Victoria, Rosella Centis was stalked and killed by her estranged husband in Nanaimo and Jay Handel killed his six children in Quatsino. In 2003, Denise Purdy was murdered in Nanaimo. In 2004, Sherry Heron and her mother, Anna Adams, were killed at Mission Memorial Hospital. In 2006, William Bethell and Seth Thornett died in Nanaimo, Navreet Waraich was murdered in Surrey, Manjit Panghali's body was found in Delta and Gurjeet Kaur Ghuman was critically injured in Surrey.

Sexual assault, and murder in the context of sexual assault, have also tragically victimized many women in BC in recent years. Robert William Pickton is charged with the murder of 26 women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. In 2005, Donald Bakker pleaded guilty to ten counts of sexual assault for offences involving torturing Vancouver area prostitutes and sex tourism with under-age girls in Cambodia. As many as 32 murders and disappearances of women on Highway 16 in BC's north are currently under investigation.

These are just some of the deaths resulting from domestic and sexual violence in BC. There have been many others. And domestic and sexual assaults resulting in death do not tell the whole story. For every homicide, there are countless assaults that do not result in death. For every assault that is reported, there are many, many others that are not. For every woman who accesses services and therefore can be "counted" in some way, there are many, many more who remain uncounted.

We must work together to stop these senseless tragedies.

### **The costs of violence against women**

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

Violence against women has significant – often overwhelming – impacts on its victims, both on the women and on the children who witness the violence or who experience the profound disturbance such violence has on family life. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a common effect of violence against women, 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 the violence was witnessed by their children. 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 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 violence against women 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 violence against women to continue.

### **Victim support services**

A range of specialized victim support services has been funded in BC since the early 1970s. Currently these include: Transition Houses, Safe Homes and Second Stage housing (hereafter referred to, for brevity, as Transition Houses); Specialized Community-Based Victim Services; Stopping the Violence Counselling programs; Outreach programs, including Multicultural Outreach programs; and Children Who Witness Abuse programs.

Throughout these *Briefing Documents*, the term "victim support services" refers to this range of specialized services. These services are Community-Based services specializing in providing services to victims of domestic and sexual violence. BC also has programs called Police-Based Victim Services. These are system-based services, attached to police stations, and provide services to victims of domestic and sexual violence where no Community-Based Victim Service exists in the community.

### **Funding of initiatives to address violence against women**

On September 11, 2000, at a meeting including then Leader of the Opposition, Gordon Campbell, then Opposition Critic, Lynn Stephens, and representatives of the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, BC Institute Against Family Violence and BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, Mr. Campbell promised more funding for services to

address violence against women if they were elected, once the economy had improved. Thus far, more funding has been provided to Transition Houses and funding has been provided to Outreach programs, both of which have addressed important needs. However, the women-serving community continues to struggle with the results of funding cuts over the past several years. The following *Briefing Documents* describe many areas that are lagging far behind, and where increased funding is required on an urgent basis.

As services for women and children who are victims of violence struggle with significant service pressures, while many programs have only one part-time staff person, and while many communities have no Community-Based Victim Services at all, \$34.5 million has accumulated in the Victim Surcharge Special Account, earmarked specifically for initiatives to address the needs of victims of crime. Over the 11 years that this fund has been accumulating, to our knowledge, no funds have flowed directly to services for victims of crime. The \$34.5 million in this fund would go some way towards meeting the urgent needs of women who are victims of violence that are outlined in the following notes.

### **Focus of these *Briefing Documents***

The focus of these *Briefing Documents* is violence against women, 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 marginalized women**

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, immigration status, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, 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 these marginalized women 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.

Wherever the experiences or needs of marginalized women are especially relevant to the issue, these are noted in the following documents. However, it is important to keep in mind, for all the issues discussed, that, wherever appropriate, consideration should be given to the particular experiences and needs of marginalized women.

## **Partnerships**

Three provincial organizations have collaborated to prepare these *Briefing Documents*: BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs; BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses; and BC Institute Against Family Violence.

These organizations work with a large number of partners to address violence against women, including Community-Based victim support agencies; three levels of government; police, Crown and other justice personnel; child protection and other social service personnel; hospitals and other health care personnel; other provincial organizations; the Justice Institute of BC and other post-secondary educational institutions; and others. The work of these organizations is also undertaken in partnership with organizations representing aboriginal women; immigrant women;<sup>1</sup> women with disabilities; lesbians and transgender women; older women; very young women and rural and isolated women.

## **Critical elements of an effective response to violence against women**

Critical elements of an effective response to violence against women 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 violence against women must address the diversity within BC communities. Rather than adopting a specific model, like the *F-P-T Report*, these *Briefing Documents* identify critical elements of an effective specialized response. These elements can serve as the foundation for a provincial strategy to address violence against women. The following *Briefing Documents* summarize these critical elements:

- Specialized support for women who are victims of violence
- Effective referral to Community-Based Victim Services
- High-risk information-sharing protocol
- Barriers to women's participation in the criminal justice process
- Addressing gaps in services for marginalized women
- Effective enforcement of protection orders
- Specialized justice processes for domestic violence
- Coordination of responses to violence against women

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, the term "immigrant" is used here to include "those who have, or have ever had, landed-immigrant status, whether or not they are currently Canadian citizens" (Statistics Canada, 2001) as well as refugees, visitors and those without legal status in this country.

- Provincial justice policies on violence against women and children
- Treatment for assaultive men
- Establishment of a Domestic Violence Death Review Committee
- Addressing sexual assault
- Third party reporting in cases of sexual assault
- Legal aid and related family law services for abused women
- Training on violence against women
- Prevention of violence against women

## References

Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation. 2003. *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation, Prepared for Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice*. Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada.

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Kerr, R. and J McLean. 1996. *Paying for Violence: Some Costs of Violence Against Women in BC*. Victoria: Ministry of Women's Equality.

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Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, British Columbia. Forthcoming. *Violence Against Women in Relationships Victim Service Worker Handbook*. Vancouver: Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Yodanis, C., A. Godenzi and E. Stanko. 2000. "The benefits of studying costs: a review and agenda for studies on the economic costs of violence against women." *Policy Studies* 21: 263-76.