

## WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

### *The Big Picture*

#### In Canada

- Violence against women is an important equality issue with serious economic, health and social consequences for individuals, families and society.
- Violence against women is both a cause and consequence of women's inequality and a violation of women's human rights.
- Women's organizations in Canada have been the catalyst for "breaking the silence" on violence against women. From the grassroots to the national level, they continue to play an instrumental role in efforts to eliminate violence against women.

#### Around the World

- Violence against women is a world-wide problem, affecting millions of women daily, cutting across national borders, race, class, ethnic, religious lines, educational and income levels.
- Research suggests that gender-based violence is a learned behaviour, linked to male power, privilege and dominance in the family and society. The social structure which sustains and maintains gender inequalities such as the general acceptance by society of subordination of women to men, and the subordination of certain women to other women, or the socio-sexual roles of men and women driven by their religion, the media, and culture, contribute to perpetuating this way of thinking and acting.

### *Facts and Figures*

#### In Canada

- In Canada, a 1997 study reported that women account for 88% of all spousal violence victims reported to a sample of 179 police agencies in Canada. (*Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 1999*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics)
- From 1978 to 1997, three times as many wives as husbands were killed by their spouse, with firearms, followed by knives, as the most frequent means of homicide, accounting for one in three cases. (*Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 1999*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics)
- Aboriginal women with status under the *Indian Act* and who are between the ages of 25 and 44 are five times more likely to experience a violent death than other Canadian women in the same age category. (*Aboriginal Women: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Summer 1996)
- In 1997, sexual offences accounted for 10% of the total number of police-reported violent offences compared with 13% in 1993. Sexual offences represented only 1% of the total number of criminal offences reported to police, however police statistics probably represent only a small portion of all sexual offences and offenders, since results from victimization surveys suggest that as many as 90% of all sexual offences are not reported to the police. (*The Daily*, Statistics Canada, March 29, 1999)
- 413 shelters for battered women that responded to a survey question indicated that 90,792 women and dependent children had been admitted between April 1, 1997 and March 31, 1998. (*Canada's Shelters for Abused Women*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999)



- On April 20, 1998, there were 470 shelters for abused women across Canada. Of these, only 18 shelters existed prior to 1975, while 57 shelters began operations between 1975 and 1979. (*Canada's Shelters for Abused Women*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999)
- The partial estimated annual costs of violence against women in the selected four policy areas of social services/education, criminal justice, labour/employment and health/medical is over \$4.2 billion. (*Selected Estimates of Costs of Violence Against Women*, Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 1995)

### Around the World

- Violence against women is a pervasive violation of human rights in the world today. The UN estimates that 1/4 of the world's women are severely abused at home. Battery is the leading cause of injury in the world among women aged 15-44 years.
- Each year, at least two million girls experience genital mutilation as dictated by custom. That's 6,000 cases a day, five girls every minute. (*Violence against Women*, Focus on Women, UN, 1995)
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, the regions with the highest reported rates of domestic violence, 30% to 60% of women are affected by violence; in some countries, 30% of all hospitalizations are caused by domestic violence. Estimated costs of domestic violence to the economy range from 1.6% to 2% of GNP. (*Special Report on Violence*, InterAmerican Development Bank, 1997)

## Towards Equality

### In Canada

- On December 6, 1998, the Canadian Ministers Responsible for Status of Women issued their *Iqaluit Declaration on Violence Against Women* as a statement of their commitment to end violence against women.
- The result of the 1999 General Social Survey by Statistics Canada will include a detailed analysis of violence by current and previous spouses, including the nature and extent of violence in marital and common-

law relationships, risk factors associated with spousal violence, the severity of the violence (injury, impact of the incident), whether the violence was reported to the police, and the use of medical and social support services.

- Pioneering Canadian legislation includes:
  - Bill C-72 (self-induced intoxication) clarified the criminal law to indicate that intoxication is not a defence to any general intent crimes of violence such as sexual assault and assault (1995);
  - Bill C-41 (sentencing) included amendments to the sentencing provisions which provide that abusing a spouse or child or a position of trust or authority in committing an offence will be considered an aggravating factor for the purposes of sentencing the offender (1995);
  - Bill C-68 (*Firearms Act*) included a national registration system for all firearms and provisions for licensing (1995);
  - Bill C-27 (child prostitution, child sex tourism, criminal harassment and female genital mutilation) included provisions to facilitate the testimony of young victims and witnesses of sexual exploitation. In addition, the legislation allows for prosecution of Canadians who travel abroad and sexually exploit children, strengthens penalties against those who exploit juvenile prostitutes and those who kill the victims they have stalked, and clarifies that the practice of female genital mutilation is an offence. The Bill also criminalizes stalking or criminal harassment (1997);
  - Bill C-46 (production of records in sexual offence proceedings) protects sexual offence victims by restricting the production of personal information records such as psychiatric, therapeutic and counselling records (1997);
  - Bill C-79 (Victims of Crime) included amendments to ensure victim safety is considered in all bail decisions, to expand provisions to facilitate the participation of victims, to permit publication bans on the identity of any victim or witness, to enhance the victim impact statement provisions and to revise

- surcharge imposed on offenders to increase provincial and territorial revenues, allowing these levels of government to improve services currently provided to victims (1999).
- The 1997 renewed Family Violence Initiative supports and complements activities across 13 federal government departments and three agencies. The Initiative addresses violence in the family, primarily as it relates to women and their children.
  - Health Canada co-ordinates the Initiative and operates the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence on behalf of all participating departments, to conduct research, to develop informational resources, to manage the family violence issue horizontally and coordinate federal activities.
- ### Around the World
- Canada initiated the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) adopted by the UN in 1993.
  - Canada was instrumental in creating the position of UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women in 1994. The Special Rapporteur was appointed to seek and receive information on violence against women, to recommend measures to eliminate violence against women and its causes, and to remedy its consequence. The Special Rapporteur is currently in her third term and support for this Canadian-led Commission on Human Rights (CHR) initiative has increased with over 70 co-sponsors from all regional groups.
  - Canada actively participated in the workshop on Women in the Criminal Justice System at the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in April 2000. Canada's Justice Minister spoke on the need for international cooperation to combat violence against women. Other Canadian presentations included enhancing survey research on violence against women and implementing international standards to eliminate violence against women.
  - The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funds projects around the world to end violence against women. For example,
    - women's organizations and community self-help groups working with female survivors of domestic violence in Central America, and in Costa Rica, a program on violence in the schools is directed specifically at girls.
    - legal literacy programs for women affected by violence in a number of countries, including legal clinics in Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
    - public awareness programs not only about domestic violence but also about trafficking, in countries such as Nepal, Thailand and Bangladesh.
    - awareness training and advocacy on violence against women who work overseas. A conference in the Philippines on reintegrating women survivors of workplace violence overseas resulted in recommendations to strengthen existing government programs and services.