



## FACT SHEET MOVING WOMEN OUT OF VIOLENCE

At the Canadian Women's Foundation, our vision is for all women in Canada to live free from violence.

That's why we invest in violence prevention programs that teach teens how to create safe and healthy relationships. It's why we help women who are in immediate danger by funding more than 450 emergency shelters across Canada. We also help women to rebuild their lives after escaping violence, through interest-free loans and other programs. We also fund counselling for children who have witnessed violence to help them heal and prevent them from becoming victims or abusers themselves.

It's also why we work to end other forms of violence, such as sex trafficking, through educational seminars, community partnerships, and much more.

### HERE ARE SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

#### 1. Since crime rates in Canada are falling, is violence against women still a serious problem?

- Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.<sup>1</sup>
- 67 per cent of all Canadians say they have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup>
- On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. In 2011, from the 89 police reported spousal homicides, 76 of the victims (over 85%) were women.<sup>3</sup>
- On any given night in Canada, about 3,300 women (along with their 3,000 children) are forced to sleep in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence. Every night, about 200 women are turned away because the shelters are full.<sup>4</sup>
- Each year, over 40,000 arrests result from domestic violence - that's about 12% of all violent crime in Canada.<sup>5</sup> Since only 22% of all incidents are reported to police, the real number is much higher.
- As of 2010, there were 582 known cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.<sup>6</sup> Both Amnesty International and the United Nations have called upon the Canadian government to take action on this issue, without success.<sup>7,8</sup> According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, "if this figure were applied proportionately to the rest of the female population there would be over 18,000 missing Canadian women and girls."<sup>9</sup>
- The cost of violence against women in Canada for health care, criminal justice, social services, and lost wages and productivity has been calculated at \$4.8 billion per year.<sup>10</sup>

- In a 2009 Canadian national survey, women reported 460,000 incidents of sexual assault in just one year.<sup>11</sup> Only about 10% of all sexual assaults are reported to police.<sup>12</sup> When it comes to sexual assault, women are frequently not believed, blamed for being assaulted, “or subjected to callous or insensitive treatment, when police fail to take evidence, or when their cases are dropped arbitrarily.”<sup>13</sup> Only a handful of reported assaults ever result in a conviction: each year, only about 1,500 sexual assault offenders are actually convicted.<sup>14</sup>
- About 80% of sex trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls.<sup>15</sup>
- More than one in ten Canadian women say they have been stalked by someone in a way that made them fear for their life.<sup>16</sup>
- Provincially, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, which have consistently recorded the highest provincial rates of police-reported violent crime, had rates of violence against women in 2011 that were about double the national rate. Ontario and Quebec had the lowest rates of violence against women. As is the case with violent crime overall, the territories have consistently recorded the highest rates of police-reported violence against women. The rate of violent crime against women in Nunavut was nearly 13 times higher than the rate for Canada.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. But isn't there less domestic violence now than in the past?

- Like all violent crime in Canada, rates of domestic violence have fallen in recent years.<sup>18</sup> This decline is partly due to increased social equality and financial freedom for women, which makes it easier for them to leave abusive relationships at earlier stages. It is also due to years of effort by groups who are working to end domestic violence. Their achievements include improved public awareness, more treatment programs for violent men, improved training for police officers and Crown attorneys, having the police lay charges rather than the victim, more coordination of community services, and the creation of domestic violence legislation in some areas of Canada.<sup>19</sup>
- Still, despite this good news, some disturbing trends are emerging:
  - In 2010, the rate of intimate partner homicide committed against females increased by 19%, the third increase in four years. During that same period, the rate for male victims fell by almost half.<sup>20</sup>
  - After falling for a decade, rates of domestic violence have now flat-lined. In 2009, the rate of self-reported spousal violence was the same as in 2004.<sup>21</sup>
  - Victims are now less likely to report an incident to police.<sup>22</sup>
  - More women are experiencing violence after leaving their abuser.<sup>23</sup>

## 3. What is violence against women?

The United Nations defines violence against women as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>24</sup>

This type of violence can include:<sup>25</sup>

- **Physical abuse:** Slapping, choking, or punching her. Using hands or objects as weapons. Threatening her with a knife or gun. Committing murder.

- **Sexual abuse:** Using threats, intimidation, or physical force to force her into unwanted sexual acts.
- **Emotional or verbal abuse:** Threatening to kill her (or to kill the children, other family members or pets), threatening to commit suicide, making humiliating or degrading comments about her body or behaviour, forcing her to commit degrading acts, isolating her from friends or family, confining her to the house, destroying her possessions, and other actions designed to demean her or to restrict her freedom and independence.
- **Financial abuse:** Stealing or controlling her money or valuables (of particular concern to older women). Forcing her to work. Denying her the right to work.
- **Spiritual abuse:** Using her religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate, dominate, and control her.
- **Criminal harassment/stalking:** Following her or watching her in a persistent, malicious, and unwanted manner. Invading her privacy in a way that threatens her personal safety.

#### 4. What causes violence against women?

- In our society, gender inequality is visible in many areas, including politics, religion, media, cultural norms, and the workplace. Both men and women receive many messages – both overt and covert – that it is natural for men to have more social power than women.
- In this context, it becomes easier to believe that men have a right to control women, even if it requires violence. This is not only wrong, it's against the law.<sup>26</sup>
- In addition to sexism, there are many other forms of society inequality that also lead to abuse and violence, including racism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and religious persecution.<sup>27</sup>
- There is no evidence that alcohol or mental illness causes men to be violent against women. Men who assault their partners rarely assault their friends, neighbours, bosses, or strangers. In fact, when it comes to alcohol, there is a clear double standard: while alcohol consumption by an offender is often used to excuse their behaviour, victims who have been drinking are often blamed for their own victimization.

#### 5. Aren't males just as likely to be victims of violence as females?

- We strongly believe that ALL violence is unacceptable, and we applaud other campaigns that work to end violence. As a women's organization, our mission focuses on women and girls. However, our teen violence prevention programs are co-ed, designed for both boys and girls.
- According to police, men (49%) and women (51%) in Canada are equally at risk of violent victimization. However, men are much more likely to be assaulted by a stranger or someone from outside their family, while women are much more likely to be assaulted by someone they know.<sup>28</sup>
- About half (49%) of all female murder victims in Canada are killed by a former or current intimate partner. In contrast, only 7% of male murder victims were killed by intimate partners.<sup>29</sup>
- Some self-reported research shows women are almost as likely to use violence against their partner as men.<sup>30</sup> Although some people claim that men are too embarrassed to admit a woman has abused them, the reverse is actually true: in self-reported research, men tend to over-estimate their partner's violence while under-estimating their own. At the same time, women over-estimate their own violence and under-estimate their partner's. This explains why self-reported research often shows similar levels of violence by men and women, even though other research clearly shows that women are disproportionately the victim.

- In addition, self-reported research does not clarify that men are far more likely to initiate violence, while women are more likely to use violence in self-defence.<sup>31</sup>
- Most men are not abusive to their families. However, when family violence does occur, the victims are overwhelmingly female:
  - 83% of all police-reported domestic assaults are against women.<sup>32</sup> This pattern is consistent for every province and territory across Canada.<sup>33</sup>
  - In spousal violence, three times as many women experience serious violence such as choking, beating, being threatened with a knife or gun, and sexual violence. Women are more likely to be physically injured,<sup>34</sup> to get a restraining order,<sup>35</sup> and to fear for their lives.<sup>36</sup>
  - For the past 30 years in Canada, women are three to four times as likely to be killed by their spouse.<sup>37</sup>
  - About 80% of victims of dating violence are female.<sup>38</sup>
  - Girls experience sexual assault at much higher rates than boys: 82% of all victims under the age of 18 are female.<sup>39</sup>
  - Girls are four times as likely as boys to be sexually assaulted by a family member.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. If a woman is being abused, why doesn't she just leave the relationship?

- Women often stay because the abuser has threatened to kill them if they leave, or to kill himself, or to kill the children.<sup>41</sup>
- Women believe these threats, for a good reason - the most dangerous time for an abused women is when she attempts to leave her abuser.<sup>42</sup> About 25% of all women who are murdered by their spouse had left the relationship.<sup>43</sup> In one study, half of the murdered women were killed within two months of leaving the relationship.<sup>44</sup>
- Some women stay because the abuser has threatened to harm or kill a household pet. In one study, over 60% of women living in an emergency shelter had their pet or their children's pet harmed and/or killed by an abusive partner.<sup>45</sup>
- Almost 60% of all dating violence happens after the woman has broken off the relationship.<sup>46</sup>
- Women sometimes stay because they are financially dependent on their partner. Over 1.22 million Canadian women live in poverty, along with their children. Women who leave a partner to raise children on their own are more than five times likely to be poor than if they had stayed.<sup>47</sup>
- Some women stay because they have strong beliefs about keeping the family together. Sometimes, relatives or in-laws blame the woman for the violence and insist she stay.
- Domestic abuse is often a gradual process, with the frequency of assaults and seriousness of the violence slowly escalating over time. Since abusers often express deep remorse and promise to change, it can take years for women to admit that the violence will never stop and the relationship is unsalvageable. The long-term experience of being abused can destroy a woman's self-confidence, making it more difficult for her to believe that she deserves better treatment, that she can find the courage to leave, or that she can manage on her own.

## 7. Who is most at risk?

- Violence against women happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, and in every income group.
- However, some women are especially at risk:
  - Aboriginal women (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) are eight times more likely to be killed by their intimate partner than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>48</sup> Aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to be victims of violence compared to non-Aboriginal women.<sup>49</sup>
  - According to both police-reported and self-reported data, younger women are at a much higher risk of violent victimization.<sup>50</sup> 66% of all female victims of sexual assault are under the age of twenty-four (11% are under the age of eleven).<sup>51</sup> The rates of violent crime against women aged 15 to 24 is 42% higher than rates for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double than the rates for women aged 35 to 44.<sup>52</sup> Women aged 15 to 24 are killed at nearly three times the rate for all female victims of domestic homicide.
  - 60% of women with a disability experience some form of violence.<sup>53</sup> According to the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, women with disabilities experience the same types of violence as other women in addition to other forms related to their disability, including: increased difficulty leaving an abuser due to mobility or communication issues, higher rates of emotional abuse, being prevented from using a necessary assistive device (wheelchair, cane, respirator, etc.), and abuse by institutional caregivers and/or other residents.<sup>54</sup>
  - Immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources.<sup>55</sup> Newcomers who arrive in Canada traumatized by war or oppressive governments are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities, for fear of further victimization or even deportation.
  - Many racialized women face barriers to reporting incidents of physical or sexual assault or seeking help. "A study with young women of colour in Toronto found that one-in-five experienced racism in the health care system which included cultural insensitivity, racial slurs, and poor quality care."<sup>56</sup>

## 8. What effect does domestic violence have on children?

- Although adults may think "the kids don't know," research shows children see or hear many domestic violence assaults.<sup>57</sup>
- Each year in Canada, it is estimated that up to 362,000 children witness or experience family violence.<sup>58</sup>
- Domestic violence is more common in homes with young children than homes with older children.<sup>59</sup>
- Children who witness violence are at immediate risk of being physically injured.<sup>60</sup> Children who grow up in violent homes are more likely to be victims of physical abuse.
- According to the RCMP, a child who witnesses spousal violence is experiencing a form of child abuse, since research shows that "witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly."<sup>61</sup>
- While not all children who witness violence suffer direct physical abuse, they frequently develop long-term behavioural and psychological problems.<sup>62</sup>

- Exposure to violence can affect children’s brain development and ability to learn, and lead to a wide range of behavioural and emotional issues such as anxiety, aggression, bullying, phobias, and insomnia.<sup>63</sup>
- Research shows that children who witness violence are more likely to grow up to become victims or abusers.<sup>64</sup>
- Children who witness violence in the home have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes.<sup>65</sup>

## 9. What should I do if I think someone is being abused?

- If someone is in immediate danger, call 911 or the emergency number in your community.
- Put her safety first. Never talk to anyone about abuse in front of their suspected abuser. Unless she specifically asks for it, never give her materials about domestic abuse or leave information through voice messages or emails that might be discovered by her abuser. However, abuse thrives in secrecy, so speak up if you can do so safely.
- If she wants to talk, listen. If she doesn’t, simply tell her she does not deserve to be harmed and that you are concerned for her safety. Ask her if there is anything you can do to help, but don’t offer to do anything that makes you uncomfortable or feels unsafe.
- If she decides to stay in the relationship, try not to judge her. Remember, leaving an abuser can be extremely dangerous. Sometimes, the most valuable thing you can offer a woman who is being abused is your respect.
- Learn about emergency services in your community, such as your local women’s shelter or sexual assault centre. Search on-line or consult the front pages of your telephone directory.

## 10. Can violence against women ever be stopped?

- Although some people may think violence against women is not very serious or is a ‘private’ matter, these attitudes can be changed. Drinking and driving was once treated almost as a joke, but thanks to strong advocacy campaigns, it is no longer socially acceptable and is subject to serious criminal penalties. In the same way, public education, violence prevention programs, and a strong criminal justice response can bring an end to violence against women in Canada.
- Violence prevention works. Research shows that high school violence prevention programs are highly effective. Even years after attending one of our programs, students experienced long-term benefits such as better dating relationships, the ability to recognize and leave an unhealthy relationship, and increased self-confidence, assertiveness, and leadership.

*(For more information, read our Healthy Relationships report, available on our website: [www.canadianwomen.org](http://www.canadianwomen.org))*

- You can help. If your local school doesn’t offer a teen violence prevention program, ask it to start one. And let your elected representatives know that you think violence against women and girls is a serious problem in Canada. Ask them what they are doing to end the violence.

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