



## 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 455 women's shelters across Canada.

We also help women to rebuild their lives after escaping violence, and fund counselling for children who have witnessed violence to help them heal and prevent them from becoming victims or abusers themselves.

This fact sheet answers some frequently asked questions about violence against women in Canada, with a focus on domestic violence. For more information on sexual assault and harassment, please see the fact sheet on our website, [www.canadianwomen.org](http://www.canadianwomen.org).

### 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?

- All Canadians pay a steep price for violence against women. It's estimated that each year, Canadians collectively spend \$7.4 billion to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone, according to the Department of Justice. This figure includes immediate costs, such as emergency room visits and related costs, such as loss of income. It also includes tangible costs such as funerals, and intangible costs such as pain and suffering.<sup>1</sup>
- Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.<sup>2</sup>
- 67% of all Canadians say they have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup>



- Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Out of the 83 police-reported intimate partner homicides in 2014, 67 of the victims—over 80%—were women.<sup>4</sup>
- On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters to escape abuse.<sup>5</sup>
- On any given night in Canada, about 300 women and children are turned away because shelters are already full.<sup>6</sup>
- There were 1,181 cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada between 1980 and 2012, according to the RCMP.<sup>7</sup> However, according to grassroots organizations and the Minister of the Status of Women the number is much higher, closer to 4,000.<sup>8</sup>
- Aboriginal women are killed at six times the rate of non-aboriginal women.<sup>9</sup>
- Women are at greater risk of experiencing elder abuse from a family member, accounting for 60% of senior survivors of family violence.<sup>10</sup>
- Rates of violence against women vary widely across Canada. 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 in 2011 was nearly 13 times higher than the rate for Canada. 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.<sup>11</sup>
- Cyber violence, which includes online threats, harassment, and stalking, has emerged as an extension of violence against women.<sup>12</sup> Young women (age 18-24) are most likely to experience online harassment in its most severe forms, including stalking, sexual harassment and physical threats.<sup>13</sup>

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

- Like most violent crime in Canada, rates of police-reported domestic violence have fallen over time.<sup>14</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>15</sup>

- It's also important to remember that the rate of domestic violence is likely much higher than we know; 70% of spousal violence is not reported to the police.<sup>16</sup>

#### Despite the decline, some disturbing trends are emerging:

- Calgary police report that domestic violence has increased in the wake of Alberta's economic downturn.<sup>17</sup> A similar link between an increase in domestic violence and the provincial economy has been noted in Newfoundland.<sup>18</sup>
- New research shows that domestic violence rates increase following natural disasters like floods, wildfires and hurricanes. After Hurricane Katrina for example, violence between partners rose by 98%.<sup>19</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable during times of crisis, when women's shelters may have to close, and social services are stretched by increased demand.<sup>20</sup> Given that Canada has its share of natural disasters, such as the 2016 wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alberta, the 2013 flood in Calgary, or the Manitoba floods of 2009 and 2011, this research points to the need for increased awareness and services related to domestic violence during these crises.
- While the proportion of intimate partner homicides committed by a legally married spouse declined between 1994 and 2014, the proportion of intimate partner homicides committed by a common-law, dating or other intimate partner has increased in the same time period.<sup>21</sup>
- A 2015 study suggests that domestic violence can carry over into the workplace, threatening women's ability to maintain economic independence. More than half (53%) of the respondents who had experienced domestic violence said that at least one type of abusive act happened at or near their workplace. Almost 40% of those who had experienced domestic abuse said it made it difficult for them to get to work, and 8.5% said that they lost their jobs because of it.<sup>22</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>23</sup>

- Spousal abuse can include:<sup>24</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>25</sup>
- It's important to consider that working toward gender equality benefits society as a whole. Rigid gender roles limit everyone, and they are a contributing factor to violence against women. Research indicates that gender equality is associated with more peaceful and stable societies,<sup>26</sup> as well as overall economic growth.<sup>27</sup>
- In addition to sexism, there are many other forms of social inequality that compound abuse and violence, including racism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and religious persecution.<sup>28</sup>
- Although research shows links between alcohol consumption and domestic violence, there is disagreement about whether alcohol can be considered a cause of violence.<sup>29</sup> When it comes to use of alcohol, there is often a double standard: while alcohol consumption by an offender may be used to excuse their behaviour, victims who have been drinking are often blamed for their own victimization.<sup>30</sup>



## 5. Aren't men just as likely to be victims of violence as women?

- 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.
- While both men and women experience violence, statistics indicate that women do experience higher rates. Women's risk of violent victimization was about 20% higher than men's in 2014, according to self-reported data from the General Social Survey on Victimization.<sup>31</sup> This is due to the fact that rates of sexual assault have remained relatively stable, while rates of robbery and physical assault have gone down, and men are more likely to be the victims of those crimes.
- 7 in 10 people who experience family violence are women and girls.<sup>32</sup>
- Women are about four times as likely as men to be victims of intimate partner homicide.<sup>33</sup>
- Women were 10 times more likely than men to be the victim of a police-reported sexual assault in 2008.<sup>34</sup>
- In terms of domestic violence, some self-reported research shows men are almost as likely as women to experience it.<sup>35</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.<sup>36</sup>
- In addition, men are more likely to initiate violence, while women are more likely to use violence in self-defence.<sup>37</sup>
- Most men are not abusive to their families. However, when family violence does occur, the victims are overwhelmingly women:
  - Women are twice as likely as men to be victims of family violence.<sup>38</sup>
  - Women who experience spousal violence are more likely to endure extreme forms assault including choking, beating, being threatened with a knife or gun, and sexual violence.<sup>39</sup>
  - About 80% of victims of dating violence are women.<sup>40</sup>
  - Girls are 1.5 times more likely than boys to experience violence at home.<sup>41</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>42</sup>
- Women believe these threats for good reason—the most dangerous time for an abused woman is when she attempts to leave her abuser.<sup>43</sup>
  - About 26% of all women who are murdered by their spouse had left the relationship.<sup>44</sup>
  - In one study, half of the murdered women were killed within two months of leaving the relationship.<sup>45</sup>
  - Women are 6 times more likely to be killed by an ex-partner than by a current partner.<sup>46</sup>
  - Many women say that they were abused by a partner after the relationship ended, and that the violence escalated following a break-up.<sup>47</sup>
  - Almost 60% of all dating violence happens after the relationship has ended.<sup>48</sup>
- Some women stay because the abuser has threatened to harm or kill a household pet. In one study, 57% of survivors of domestic violence had their pet killed by an abusive partner.<sup>49</sup>
- Women might stay because they are financially dependent on their partner; leaving an abusive relationship may involve a choice between violence and poverty.
  - More than 1.5 million women in Canada live on a low income.<sup>50</sup>
  - Women who leave a partner to raise children on their own are five times more likely to be poor than if they had stayed.<sup>51</sup>
  - About 1 in 5 single mothers in Canada live on a low income.<sup>52</sup>
- The mental health consequences of abuse can make it difficult for women to leave a relationship. Sixty-four per cent of battered women exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>53</sup>
- 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 of violence against women?

- 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 six times more likely to be killed than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>54</sup> Aboriginal women are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>55</sup>
- According to both police-reported and self-reported data, younger women are at a much higher risk of violent victimization.<sup>56</sup>
- The rates of violent crime against women aged 15 to 24 are 42% higher than rates for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double the rates of women aged 35 to 44.<sup>57</sup>
- Rates of spousal violence and homicide are highest for women in the 15 to 24 age group.<sup>58</sup>
- Women living with physical and cognitive impairments experience violence two to three times more often than women living without impairments.<sup>59</sup>
- 60% of women with a disability experience some form of violence.<sup>60</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
  - having greater difficulty accessing shelter services and/or transportation
  - enduring higher rates of emotional abuse
  - being prevented from using a necessary assistive device (ex. wheelchair or cane)
  - experiencing abuse by institutional caregivers and/or other residents.<sup>61</sup>
- Immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources. 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.<sup>62</sup>
- Women who identified as lesbian or bisexual were three to four times more likely than heterosexual women to report experiencing spousal violence.<sup>63</sup>
- Studies show that when women of colour report violence, their experiences are taken less seriously within the criminal justice system.<sup>64</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>65</sup>
- Children who witness 10 or more incidents of parental domestic violence before the age of 16 are at least twice as likely to attempt suicide.<sup>66</sup>
- Each year, up to 362,000 children in Canada are exposed to family violence.<sup>67</sup>
- Children who witness violence in the home have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes.<sup>68</sup>
- Domestic violence is more common in homes with young children than homes with older children.<sup>69</sup>
- 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>70</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 and phobias.<sup>71</sup>
- Research shows that children who witness violence are more likely to grow up to become victims or abusers.<sup>72</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 online 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.
- Increased awareness about violence against women is also due to the courageous advocacy work of survivors and the family members of victims. It's not easy to publicly identify the abuse, challenge gender inequality and victim-blaming, and how our society deals with violence against women, but it contributes to broader social awareness and change.
- 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 reports, 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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### ENDNOTES

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