



## 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?

- On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. In 2009, 67 women were murdered by a current or former spouse or boyfriend.<sup>1</sup>
- On any given day in Canada, more than 3,000 women (along with their 2,500 children) are living in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>
- Each year, over 40,000 arrests result from domestic violence—that's about 12% of all violent crime in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Since only 22% of all incidents are reported to the police, the real number is much higher.
- As of 2010, there were 582 known cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Both Amnesty International and the United Nations have called upon the Canadian government to take action on this issue, without success.<sup>5,6</sup>
- In just one year in Canada, 427,000 women over the age of 15 reported they had been sexually assaulted.<sup>7</sup> Since only about 10% of all sexual assaults are reported to the police, the actual number is much higher.<sup>8</sup>
- Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.<sup>9</sup>
- About 80% of sex trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls.<sup>10</sup>
- Sixty seven per cent of all Canadians say they have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.<sup>11</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>12</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 \$4.2 billion per year.<sup>13</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>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 co-ordination of community services, and the creation of domestic violence legislation in some areas of Canada.<sup>15</sup>
- Still, despite this good news, some disturbing trends are emerging:
  - 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>16</sup>
  - Victims are now less likely to report an incident to police.<sup>17</sup>
  - More women are experiencing violence after they leave their abuser.<sup>18</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>19</sup>

This violence can include:<sup>20</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:** Making degrading comments about her body or behaviour. Forcing her to commit degrading acts. Confining her to the house. Destroying her possessions. Threatening to kill her or the children. Threatening to commit suicide.
- **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?

- The roots of violence are founded in the belief that the needs, feelings, or beliefs of one person or group are more correct or more important than those of another person or group. This fundamental inequality creates a rationale for humiliation, intimidation, control, abuse—even murder.
- 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 blatant and covert—that men are more important than women. In this context, it becomes easier for a man to believe that he has the right to be in charge and to control a woman, even if it takes violence. This is not only wrong, it's against the law.
- 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.

## 5. Aren't males just as likely to be victims 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>21</sup>
- Some self-reported research shows women are almost as likely to use violence against their partner as men.<sup>22</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 victims.
- 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>23</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>24</sup> This pattern is consistent for every province and territory across Canada.<sup>25</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>26</sup> to get a restraining order,<sup>27</sup> and to fear for their lives.<sup>28</sup>
  - For the past 30 years in Canada, women are three to four times as likely to be killed by their spouse.<sup>29</sup>
  - Over 80% of victims of dating violence are female.<sup>30</sup>
  - Girls are four times as likely as boys to be sexually assaulted by a family member.<sup>31</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.
- Women believe these threats, for good reason - the most dangerous time for an abused woman is when she attempts to leave her abuser.<sup>32</sup> About 25% of all women who are murdered by their spouse had left the relationship.<sup>33</sup> In one study, half of the murdered women were killed within two months of leaving the relationship.<sup>34</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>35</sup>
- Almost 60% of all dating violence happens after the woman has broken off the relationship.<sup>36</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>37</sup>
- Some women stay because they have strong beliefs about keeping 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. In the meantime, the long-term experience of being abused can destroy women's self-confidence, making it more difficult to believe they deserve better treatment, can find the courage to leave, or can manage on their 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 more than eight times more likely to be killed by their intimate partner than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>38</sup>
  - Young women are especially at risk. 66% of all female victims of sexual assault are under the age of twenty-four, and 11% are under the age of eleven.<sup>39</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>40</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>41</sup>

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

- Although adults may think "the kids don't know," research shows that children see or hear 40 to 80% of domestic violence assaults.<sup>42</sup>
- Each year in Canada, an estimated 360,000 children witness or experience family violence.<sup>43</sup>
- Children who witness this violence are at immediate risk of being physically injured.

- Long-term exposure to these traumatic events 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>44</sup> Children who witness violence in the home have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes.<sup>45</sup>
- These long-term effects can easily extend into adulthood. Research shows that children who witness violence are more likely to grow up to become victims or abusers.<sup>46</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>47</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 about 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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## ENDNOTES

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