

ACWS POSITION ON INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE

February, 2004

ACWS respects the inherent worth of all human beings and believes that no person deserves to be abused. We acknowledge that both men and women report experiencing violence and abuse in the context of their intimate relationships; however, we stand together with women and children who are impacted by intimate partner violence believing the evidence that abuse against women by male partners

Is more often repetitive and life-threatening

Is almost twice as likely to involve being threatened with a gun or knife

Is more than twice as likely to result in beating, five times more likely to involve choking and result in women fearing for their lives.

For these reasons, ACWS supports the maintenance and expansion of specialized shelter services for women and children in the province and we support further exploration through action based research of the need for specialized services for men within the context of existing services.

The Controversy

There is perhaps no issue in the field of family violence as controversial as the abuse of men by women intimate partners. Women do abuse men in the context of their intimate relationships.¹ However, the serious abuse of men by women intimate partners is not as prevalent. Estimates suggest 8 to 9 times as many women as men are abused, and there is no documentation that men need the same resources, such as shelters.² As the 1999 General Social Survey on Victimization conducted by Statistics Canada clarifies, abuse against women by male partners tends to be more serious:

Women were more than twice as likely to report being beaten, five times more likely to report being choked, and almost twice as likely to report being threatened by or having a gun or knife used against them.

Less than 30 years ago, the first shelters for abused women opened in Canada. At the time, women's groups had considerable difficulty convincing funders, the government and the public at large that the physical and emotional abuse of women by male intimate partners warranted the creation of special facilities to house and protect them. Since then, shelters have become widely acknowledged as being at the forefront of interventions to assist and prevent woman abuse. They have become available in all large Canadian cities and many small towns. They have become centers for disseminating knowledge about the issue, and offer a variety of programs to all family members affected by domestic violence, including the children who often witness the abuse, and, in some cases, even the men who are abusive.³

In Alberta 40 women's shelters provide an essential public service. Last year these shelters provided safe haven for 5,194 women and their 5,546 children fleeing abuse. They responded to 41,414 callers on their crisis lines and were unable to accommodate 8,443 abused women and their 9,017 children because they were full. Those individuals turned away from our shelters were

¹ Pottie Bunge, V. & Locke, D, (Eds). 2000. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2000*, 2000. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.)

² Tutty, L.(1999) *Husband Abuse: An overview of research and perspectives*. Ottawa, ON: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

³ Goard, C. & Tutty, L., 2003. *Turning Points: An Analysis of YWCA Violence Against Women Shelters and Family Violence Programs*, Toronto: YWCA of Canada

supported in the community to maintain their safety through shelter outreach services, available in many centers in the province.

The experience of front line workers in Canada, and particularly in Alberta, continues to be that significantly fewer men are as seriously abused as battered women. Virtually no research has been conducted to describe the experiences of men abused by women intimate partners. The following statistics gathered informally through the Calgary Domestic Violence Committee attests to this experience.

In Calgary, 2 of our women's shelters provide safe haven for men fleeing intimate abusive relationships. Wheatland Shelter in Strathmore sheltered a total of 7 men in 2003 and 3 men in 2002 as well as providing advocacy and referral services to men through their outreach service. Kerby Rotary Shelter, a specialized seniors shelter, has sheltered 36 men since it opened 4 years ago.

A specialized domestic violence docket court opened in Calgary in May 2000. Initial evaluation results indicate 90% of the accused are men, while 15% of victims are men.⁴ A unique feature of the court is that offenders are fast tracked through the court into treatment in the community. Since the onset of the court approximately 888 individuals have been referred for treatment to two counseling agencies. Approximately 10%, or 88 women have been mandated into domestic violence treatment. With the implementation of the coordinated domestic violence court four years ago, the Calgary Counselling Centre and the YWCA Sheriff King Home expanded their programs for perpetrators of domestic violence to include groups for women who are abusive in the context of intimate relationships. Last year, the court referred 407 men and 45 women to the YWCA Sheriff King Home domestic violence treatment programs. In addition, the Calgary Counselling Centre is piloting a group for men who are abused. Over the last 3 years they have provided service to 26 men in the context of this program. They report ongoing difficulty in recruiting participants for the program, even though the program has been well advertised broadly in the community.

Counselling services for men who have been sexually abused are available throughout Alberta through the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres. In Calgary, the Calgary Communities Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) reports that in 2003, men represented 15% of clients, the majority of whom were survivors of childhood abuse. A small number of men reported being sexually assaulted as adults, with their perpetrators reported as being usually men, although a couple reported being abused by their mothers.⁵

In conclusion, it is the position of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters that no person deserves to be abused and any violence must be taken seriously. To date, we have little idea of how many men may be the sole victims of partner abuse such that they require specialized services and how many men need assistance. We do however know the extent and nature of the abuse that both men and women report experiencing in Canada in the context of their intimate relationships.⁶ This information supports the maintenance and expansion of specialized shelter services for women and children in the province and further exploration through action based research of the need for specialized services for men within the context of existing services. An example of such a project underway now in Alberta is Calgary Counselling's examination of their "Turn for the Better Group", a group for abused men. Additional action based - research must address the unique needs and experiences of men in diverse populations such as the gay/lesbian/transgendered community, seniors and the aboriginal community.

⁴ *Homefront Evaluation: Overview and emerging results.* Synergy Selinger Presentation, November, 2003

⁵ *Calgary Domestic Violence Committee, Men's Treatment Issues Meeting, February, 2004*

⁶ *A Statistical Profile 2002, Statistics Canada, 2002. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*

Spousal Violence Facts

- One-quarter of all violent crimes reported to a sample of police services in 2001 involved cases of family violence. Two-thirds of these cases were violence committed by a spouse or ex-spouse and 85% of the victims were female.⁷
- In Canada, firearm use in spousal violence resulted in 19 deaths in 2001, with 18 female victims and 1 male victim.⁸
- Overall, women are at greater risk of being a victim of criminal harassment compared to men across every age group and victim-offender relationship.⁹
- Statistics Canada's 1999 General Social Survey shows that during the five years previous to the survey, 8% of women and 7% of men had experienced violence by a spousal partner. **Women however reported more serious forms and more serious consequences than did men.**¹⁰
- According to the 1999 Statistics Canada General Social Survey, female victims of spousal violence were three times as likely as male victims to take time off as a result of the violence (33% compared to 10%) and five times more likely to have received medical attention (15% versus 3%) and to have been hospitalized as a result of the violence (11% versus 2%). As well fear was more prevalent among women than men: **approximately**

⁷ Johnson, H. & Au Coin, K. (Eds). 2003. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2003. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

⁸ Johnson, H. & Au Coin, K. (Eds). 2003. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2003*, Statistics Canada, 2003. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.).

⁹ Incident-Based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2001 reported in Johnson, H. & Au Coin, K. 2003. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2003*, Statistics Canada, 2003. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.).

¹⁰ Pottie Bunge, V. & Locke, D. (Eds). 2000. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2000*, 2000. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.).

four women in ten feared for their lives because of the violence, while the rate for men was less than one in ten.¹¹

- The dynamics of wife-to-husband abuse are different from those of husband to wife abuse.¹² A research study asking about the motives behind aggressive behaviour in couples found that women were more likely than men to use violence to defend themselves from direct physical attack, to escape from attack or to retaliate for prior physical and emotional abuse. In contrast male perpetrators claimed that they used violence primarily to dominate and control their partners.¹³

¹¹ Reported in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2002*, Statistics Canada, 2002. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.).

¹² Tutty, L. (1999) *Husband abuse: An overview of Research and perspectives*. Family Violence Prevention Unit, Health Canada.

¹³ Hamberger, L.K., Lohr, J.M., Bonge, D., & Tolin, D.F. (1997). An empirical classification of motivations for domestic violence. *Violence against women*, 3(4), 401-423.