

INTRODUCTION TO PARTNER ABUSE

Defining the Issue

This Protocol recognizes that **partner abuse includes a broad continuum of coercive, threatening, controlling and violent behaviours**, some of which, like assault and criminal harassment, are currently identified as criminal offences in the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Partner abuse may include threats to harm the victim, children, other family members, pets and property. Threats and/or acts of violence are used to intimidate, humiliate and frighten victims, undermine their self confidence, and/or generate feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. A single act of violence between intimate partners is recognized as partner abuse; partner abuse may also include a multitude of behaviours and actions that may appear minor or trivial when viewed in isolation, but collectively form a pattern of control and abuse.

Despite the wide range of abusive and violent behaviours demonstrated by perpetrators of partner abuse, this Protocol recognizes that all forms of partner abuse share several **common and distinctive features**, such as:

- a dynamic of power and control;
- a tendency for victims to feel and/or assume responsibility for the violence and abuse directed towards them;
- significant and often debilitating physical, emotional, and economic effects on both the victims of partner abuse and their children;
- a pattern of escalation in the frequency of incidents of violence and in the severity of that violence;
- recurring and inter-generational cycles of violence.

The signatories of this Protocol recognize and accept that:

Partner abuse is a social issue that demands a comprehensive response from governments, institutions, communities, organizations, and individuals designed to identify and eliminate the underlying causal and contributing factors to partner abuse.

Partner abuse is a legal/criminal issue that demands interventions and strategies designed to hold individual offenders responsible for their choices and behaviour. Where reasonable grounds exist to support a criminal charge, the police will charge and forward the matter to the Crown Attorney for prosecution.

Partner abuse is a community issue that demands a coordinated, collaborative response designed to support and assist victims/survivors and their children in their efforts to recover from the negative effects of violence and abuse, and to live a life free from violence. Respect for each partner agency's particular expertise in responding to the issues of partner abuse is critical to the development and maintenance of a coordinated, collaborative response.

Detailed definitions of various types of partner abuse can be found in Appendix 5.

Incidence of Partner Abuse

While the existence of partner abuse can be traced back through recorded history, the severity of partner abuse in Canada was brought to our national attention in the early 1970's. The first shelters for abused women in Canada were established in the mid 1970's. Three decades later, their number has grown exponentially: today there are more than 550 shelters for abused women in Canada; 130 of which are in Ontario. Yet the demand for shelter and safety continues to exceed availability. **On average, 200 abused women are turned away from shelters across the country each day.**

Over the past 30 years, our understanding of the prevalence and complexity of partner abuse has grown. Coordinating committees have been established in many communities to support and facilitate positive working relationships among the many different agencies and organizations working with victims of partner abuse and their families.

Details of significant national, provincial and local milestones in the effort to eradicate partner abuse, along with a description of the QCCAV can be found in Appendix 6.

IN CANADA:

- **PERPETRATORS OF SPOUSAL HOMICIDE OR ATTEMPTS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY MALE. (82%)¹**
- **WOMEN ARE PARTICULARLY AT RISK OF BEING ASSAULTED OR ABUSED DURING PREGNANCY AND FOLLOWING SEPARATION**
- **BETWEEN 1975 AND 2005, THE RATE OF SPOUSAL HOMICIDE AGAINST FEMALES HAS BEEN 3 TO 5 TIMES HIGHER THAN AGAINST MALES.²**
- **WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES ARE 1.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE THAN NON-DISABLED WOMEN.³**
- **OTHER POPULATIONS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO PARTNER ABUSE INCLUDE: GIRLS AND WOMEN AGED 15 TO 24 YEARS; INDIVIDUALS IN RELATIONSHIPS OF THREE YEARS OR LESS; WOMEN IN COMMON-LAW RELATIONSHIPS; AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SEPARATED FROM THEIR ABUSIVE PARTNER.⁴**

¹ Ogrodnik, Lucie, *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2007.

² Ogrodnik, Lucie, *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile*, Statistics Canada, 2007.

³ Sobsey, Dick, *Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disabilities: The End of Silent Acceptance*, Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Toronto 1994.

⁴ Statistics Canada, 2005.

IN THE QUINTE REGION STATISTICS FOR 2005:

POLICE SERVICE	# OF INCIDENTS	# OF CHARGES	# OF MURDERS
BELLEVILLE CITY	309	156	0
QUINTE WEST OPP	89	108	0
STIRLING/RAWDON	7	3	0
8 WING MILITARY POLICE	12	16	0

THREE OAKS FOUNDATION

- **SHELTER SERVICES - 89 WOMEN AND 75 CHILDREN WERE REFERRED ELSEWHERE, AS THE SHELTER WAS FULL**

Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Partner

Disclosing or leaving an abusive relationship is a difficult, frightening, complex process. Women are most likely to leave an abusive partner when: their children witness the violence and/or are also being abused; the woman fears for her life; and/or she has access to accurate information about options and positive support for her decision to leave.

However, the majority of abused women do not contact the police, go to a shelter or leave their abusive partner. Women may be hesitant to disclose for many different reasons, and even when they disclose and reach out for help and assistance, they are often confronted with significant barriers that compromise their ability to establish and maintain a violence-free life for themselves and their children. Awareness of these barriers helps us to improve our support for victims and their families.

Some of these barriers may be:

Learned behaviour: Women in violent relationships are twice as likely to have witnessed their fathers assaulting their mothers as women in non-violent relationships. Social learning theory suggests that girls who witness their mothers being abused learn that abusive and violent behaviour: is appropriate or “normal” in intimate relationships; is an acceptable way for men to express their feelings or solve problems; and is something women deserve or should at least expect and tolerate.

Emotional and psychological factors: A variety of emotional and psychological factors may make it difficult for some women to leave. The woman may love the abuser and hope that the relationship will improve, putting her commitment to the relationship over her own safety and well being. She may therefore minimize or deny that the abuse is happening. She may also believe that she is at fault and is the one who needs to change. She may be overwhelmed with feeling of guilt, shame and embarrassment.

As a result of ongoing emotional abuse, she may feel hopeless and helpless, believing that the abuse is her fault. She may not even think that leaving is an option to her.

Financial obstacles: There may be financial obstacles to leaving the relationship and the woman may be concerned that she will be unable to provide for her children. She may be financially dependent on the abuser, and may have little or no income; limited work experience might make it difficult for her to find employment.

Inaccessibility of social services: She may have tried to leave in the past, only to find that there were waiting lists and/or fees for counselling, housing, daycare and other services.

Language or cultural barriers: She may have difficulty finding and/or accessing services that are culturally and linguistically sensitive. She may have experienced prejudice, discrimination, or racism in past encounters with various institutions and agencies. Where interpreters are available, they may be people from the same community as the woman, which may make her feel uncomfortable and may threaten confidentiality or her safety.

Older women with certain conditions such as Alzheimer's, women with disabilities, and/or deaf women may not be able to tell anyone that they have been abused.

Helplessness: A woman's experience of abuse over time: undermines her self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, confidence and independence; establishes and reinforces a "habit of compliance" in relations to the abuser; and isolates her from friends, family and social supports. She may know from past attempts at leaving that the abuser will search for her until she is found.

Faith: She may have strong beliefs about keeping the relationship and family together. Separation and divorce may be contrary to her religious beliefs. She may also have concerns that her children will grow up without their father.

Fatigue: She may be too physically and emotionally exhausted to leave.

Lack of access to safe, adequate and affordable shelter and housing: The woman may not have anywhere to go with her children if she leaves. This may be even more difficult for women who require physically accessible housing or live in a small rural community.

Fear: She may fear retaliation by the abuser, fear for her life, fear of losing her children, or fear that her family, friends, possessions and/or pets will be harmed. A woman may also fear the impact of the "system" if she leaves. She may fear discrimination, deportation, and/or lack of protection. She may fear the involvement of the police and/or the Children's Aid Society. She may also fear the consequences of leaving her partner, including being ostracized by her community, bringing shame to her family, and being vulnerable without male protection.

While less research has been completed in relation to victims and survivors of partner abuse within same-sex relationships and male victims and survivors within heterosexual relationships, it is reasonable to assume that some of these barriers may compromise their willingness and ability to reach out for help and/or end the abusive relationship.