

## 19. Violence Against Women

Violence against women takes many forms: partner abuse, sexual violence, workplace harassment, abuse within institutions/residential care, and within community systems and services. It can be any combination of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. While much of it takes place at the personal level, the violence continues because it is still accepted at a social and institutional level.

It is well established that violence against women is rooted in social, political and economic inequality between men and women.

While all women live with the threat of male violence, some face additional inequalities that compound the problem. Among these are aboriginal women, women of colour, recent immigrants, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, older women and poor women. They are at greater risk of abuse and violence.

Violence against women has serious impacts on our children, both today and in their future lives.

Women are not victims by nature, they become victims because we cannot access the means to protect and support our children and ourselves. Strengthening women's economic and social position must be the centrepiece of any plan to stop violence against women and children.

Canadian society is becoming dangerously polarized between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', and many women are falling further and further behind. This has unquestionably weakened women's position in ending violence against women.

Public policy initiatives on solutions to violence against women focus primarily on the criminal system and gender-neutral approaches. They favour the use of heavy-handed law enforcement strategies against socially disadvantaged groups. This fails to address the violence women face in their intimate family relationships, or within institutions and workplaces. Violence is a serious crime, and the men who commit it must be held responsible and given the appropriate penalties. At the same time, the tendency to divert attention away from the broader needs of women and children is both dangerous and reprehensible.

In Ontario, years of cuts to basic social programs and community services, health care, education, workplace safety standards, legal aid, direct anti-violence services and neighbourhood supports left women in a hardened state of inequality, leaving us increasingly at risk of violence.

Women's safety and freedom depends on a comprehensive, consistent, long-term approach that addresses the root problem of women's social, economic and political inequality.

Women and children have a fundamental human right to live free from violence and threats of violence. This is the law in Canada - the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Criminal Code make this clear. Both immediate intervention and prevention strategies must be government priorities and must acknowledge the following principles:

- violence against women is a gender-specific reality and requires a gender-specific solution;
- all approaches must be inclusive and must respect and reflect the diversity of all women and children in Ontario;
- public policy must include active participation of women from all communities;
- ending violence requires a commitment from all sectors of the community;
- government has a social and legal responsibility to use public resources to stop violence against women and children, and
- all policies and practices to address violence against women must include accountability processes and mechanisms for both individual abusers and systems/services.

Women and children cannot wait. Anyone seeking to represent the people of Ontario must immediately make a commitment to these essential principles and strategies to end violence against women. The coming provincial election is an opportunity for all political parties to demonstrate that commitment.

### ***Recommendations for A People's Charter:***

*Women's advocates have developed numerous strategies for addressing and ending violence against women. They fall into the following general areas:*

- ***Increases to basic social supports, including social assistance, low-income and subsidized housing, childcare, health care, education and legal aid.***

- **Legislative reform that reflects the reality of violence against women in areas of:**
  - family, civil and criminal law;
  - human rights;
  - legislation governing the workplace, including pay and employment equity, and all areas of administrative law.
  
- **Implementation of legislative reforms with concrete practices to address violence against women.**
  
- **Independent, women-controlled community-based services, including:**
  - women's shelters;
  - sexual assault centres;
  - neighbourhood women's centres and specific services for diverse communities of women, and
  - anti-violence education services.
  
- **Government commitment to public advocacy, including financial support and recognition of women's and equality-seeking groups as essential to the development of policy, practice and programs to end violence against women.**