

# Family Violence: Facts to Consider



Family violence costs over \$4.2 billion in Canada. This figure includes social services, education, criminal justice, labour, employment, health, and medical costs.

## Child Abuse

**All forms of abuse and neglect are harmful to children.**

**Different forms of abuse tend to cluster together.** For example:

- Emotional abuse usually comes first and is part of other forms of abuse
- Neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse are often present in the same home
- At least one other form of abuse usually goes along with sexual abuse, which has profound emotional impacts on children and young people.

Conditions that make child abuse more likely:

- When parents/guardians grew up in abusive homes or witnessed abuse as children
- When parents/guardians have substance abuse or other addiction problems
- When parents/guardians are under enormous personal stress (e.g. poverty, unemployment, health problems, emotional or mental illness, relationship difficulties)
- When a parent/guardian sees their children as objects or possessions
- When a parent/guardian doesn't understand normal child behaviour or healthy child development

## Startling Statistics

- In a Canadian classroom of 22, on average two children will be affected by family violence.
- Of the sexual assaults and physical assaults reported to 166 Canadian police agencies in 2000, 23% of all victims were children and youth under the age of 18.
- Among those cases reported to police, children and youth are most frequently victimized by an acquaintance (52%) or a family member (23%), while strangers assaulted only 19% of victims.
- Between 1974 and 2000, a family member was the perpetrator in 63% of homicides of children and youth.
- A Canadian study of child welfare services across Canada during a three-month period in 1998 found a rate of almost 10 substantiated cases of child maltreatment for every 1,000 children in Canada. The vast majority of alleged perpetrators (93%) were family members or other people related to the child victim.
- As children get older and become more independent, their sphere of relationships expands and the rate of physical assaults committed by non-family members becomes significantly higher than the rate for family members.
- According to the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*, in 2003 the most common forms of confirmed child abuse in Canada were:
  - 30% Neglect
  - 28% Exposure to violence
  - 24% Physical abuse
  - 15% Emotional abuse
  - 3% Sexual abuse
- According to the same study, the rate of exposure to domestic violence increased 259% from 1998 to 2003.

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- The rate of substantiated maltreatment in Canada, excluding Quebec, has increased 125% over the same time period. This increase in documented maltreatment may be explained by improved and expanded reporting and investigation procedures.
- A Saskatchewan Social Services report noted that underfeeding causes over 50% of the cases of “failure to thrive” in infants.
- A Nova Scotia task force found that 70% of the children on child welfare caseloads had or were suffering from neglect.
- 53% of females and 31% of males have been victims of one or more unwanted sexual acts. Approximately four in five of those incidents happened to the victims when they were children or youths.
- Dr. Ken Finkel, in an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, estimated that 25% of women and 10% of men are sexually abused before the age of 16.
- A U.S. national family violence survey revealed that each year nearly 1.5 million children are very severely abused (kicking, burning, scalding, threatening or attacking with a knife or gun). When added to incidence of severe violence (hitting a child with an object), it is estimated that 6.9 million children are physically abused in the U.S. each year.

### Facts about victims of child abuse

- Child abuse is not confined to any one group or social class; it cuts across all ethnic, religious, social, and economic backgrounds. However, it is usually those families of lower socio-economic status who come to the attention of the public authorities.
- The effects of child abuse are far-reaching and profound with serious social consequences including delinquency, criminality, mental illness, developmental delays and teenage pregnancy.
- Victims of child abuse are at considerable risk of suffering from language delays, learning disabilities, mental illness, and brain damage.
- Children who are brought up in an abusive home likely to sustain under-nutrition or suffer growth delays.
- While physical assault cases are more likely to come to the attention of the public authorities, neglect can represent an equally serious risk to a child. Child abuse has received considerable public attention in recent years, while neglect has not.
- A study done in Toronto with adolescent runaways found that nearly 75% of them had been physically beaten as children.
- Victims of childhood abuse are at a greater risk of becoming abusers themselves. A recent study done for Correctional Services Canada found that 75% of abusive husbands came from violent abusive families.
- A study done with male adolescent prostitutes found that family members had subjected 72% of them to physical or emotional abuse.
- Children are not capable of giving informed consent to sexual activity, since they cannot understand or predict the consequences of adult-child sexual contact.
- Children are most vulnerable to sexual abuse beginning in the preadolescent stage between the ages of 8 and 12.
- Children who are isolated from others, with few friends and little contact with brothers and sisters, are at a greater risk of victimization.
- The closer the social relationship, not necessarily the biological one, between the child and the person who uses abusive behaviour, the greater the potential trauma to the child. Sexual assault by a trusted neighbour, for example, might be more damaging than abuse by a distant uncle.

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- Especially in cases of incest, enforced secrecy and a child's fear of destroying the privacy and security of the family are such powerful obstacles to disclosure that children rarely reveal their sexual victimization until they are adults, and many never tell.
- There is little evidence that many children deliberately make false allegations of misinterpret appropriate adult-child contact as sexual abuse. In the few recorded cases where children have made false allegations, it has almost always been the result of manipulation by an adult.

### Facts about individuals that abuse children

- Parents who use abusive behaviour or are abusing their children are often afraid or emotionally unable to ask for help from outside support systems, even when the resources are available.
- The vast majority of parents who abuse have themselves been abused as children; however, not all victims of abuse go on to abuse children.
- All ages, economic groups and social classes are represented in the backgrounds of people who use abusive behaviours. However, a number of studies have shown that, given the same injury or condition, children from low income homes are much more likely to be reported as being abused than children from middle or upper income families.
- Many people who use abusive behaviours view themselves as victims, feeling that they have lost control of their children and their own lives. When confronted with what they perceive to be disrespectful behaviour from their children, they lash out in an effort to establish control.
- Child-abusing parents often demand a level of physical, social, and emotional maturity which is inappropriate, given the age of their children.
- Most sexual offenders are not strangers. Studies reveal that in nine out of ten cases the perpetrator is either related or known to the victim.
- More than 90% of the reported sexual abusers are male.

### Violence against Women

- In 2004, Alberta had the highest rate of reported spousal assault in Canada at 11% and the highest rates of domestic homicide in Canada.
- In 2004, a Statistics Canada report stated that:
  - 8% of Canadian women, including 11% of women in Alberta, reported being abused by their intimate partner in the past five years.
  - 12% of women aged 18-24 reported abuse.
  - 80% of Aboriginal women in Canada reported abuse.
  - 40% of women with disabilities reported abuse.
  - 21% of women who reported abuse were pregnant at the time of the first incident.
  - 64% of female murder victims are killed by their intimate partners.
- 12% of Canadian women aged 18 to 24 reported at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner in a one-year period, compared with the national average of 3% of all married or cohabiting women.
- Two-thirds of women admitted to shelters in 1995 were under the age of 35, while fewer than 5% were over 55 years of age.
- In Canada, 21% of women abused by a partner were assaulted during pregnancy, and 40% reported that the abuse began during pregnancy.
- According to the 1999 General Social Survey, Aboriginal women were twice as likely as Aboriginal men, and three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women and men, to report having been assaulted by a current or former spouse during the preceding five-year period.

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- Between 1991 and 1999, rates of spousal homicide were more than eight times higher among Aboriginal women compared with non-Aboriginal women in Canada (47.2 per million compared with 5.8 per million).
- Foreign domestic workers employed at low wages and isolated in private homes are vulnerable to threats of deportation if they complain of physical or sexual abuse. They are often unaware of their legal rights or available services.

### Violence against Men

Perhaps the most contentious and least understood aspect of domestic violence is the issue of female-to-male partner violence. In the early years of advocacy, research, and policy on family violence, violence toward men was explained away as exclusively carried out in self-defense, an insignificant or distracting aberration that took the focus off the true victims—women. Research is consistent, however, in finding higher than expected rates of violence toward men.

Alberta's two major cities have services specific to abused men offered by professional counselors: Calgary Counselling's Turn for the the Better groups and the City of Edmonton Community Services, "From Chaos to Peace" groups.

Violence against men is also found at higher levels among Aboriginal men. Between 1991 and 1999, The rate of spousal homicide was 18 times greater among Aboriginal men compared with non-Aboriginal men (27.6 per million compared with 1.5 per million).

The best research indicates that in approximately half of cases of violence against men, the violence was mutual at least some of the time. Additionally, a 1999 study concluded that women who are abused "expressed being highly fearful in a way that was qualitatively different from the despair and frustration described by most of the men who were abused by their partners. The nature of the abuse against the women extended beyond physical violence, and included sexual assault and extensive control." The same study indicated that it is still primarily women who are suffering serious injury and death due to abuse and that women face many additional barriers to escaping abusive relationships.

### Abuse & Neglect of older persons

Older adults also experience family violence, particularly emotional or financial abuse. Approximately 7% of older adults reported that they had experienced some form of emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, spouse, or caregiver from 1994-1999.

Police-reported data for 2000 suggests that those aged 65 years and older have the lowest risk of experiencing violent crime. When older adults are victimized, they are twice as likely to be victimized by non-family members.

In cases of family violence toward older adults, adult children and spouses are the most likely perpetrators.