

WOMEN'S SAFETY*

Strategic Overview

Municipalities strive to ensure the safety and quality of life of all their citizens. So services and resources must be balanced in terms of the needs of both women and men.

The impact of crime and violence on women's and men's lives can be very different. Women are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault, and are more likely than men to express concerns about their ability to move about the city in safety. Women are also much more likely than men to experience serious violence in intimate relationships. Such violence is now widely regarded as a violation of human rights and an issue of gender equality, and as a threat to public health.

Municipalities can have a major impact on the safety of women and girls by developing careful strategic approaches, and investing in programmes and support services.

A number of Canadian cities have implemented specific programmes which take account of the different needs and experiences of women and men and outside Canada there are some excellent municipal programmes which work in partnership with the community. Making cities safer for women helps to make them safer for everyone.

Action for Municipal Stakeholders

1. Set up a consultative and central committee within the municipal structure to work with other sectors and local community organizations, to plan and implement strategies on women's safety with health, social, family, environmental, housing, justice services etc;
2. Ensure that data collection looks at both genders separately, so that analysis of patterns, causes, and decisions about how to tackle the problems can be made more accurately and easily;
3. Develop a comprehensive strategy with a range of preventive programmes to reduce insecurity and promote women's safety in public and private;
4. Include programmes that work with boys and men to shape attitudes about the use of male violence against women;
5. Allocate resources on a regular and not a pilot basis.

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Justification

Violence against women, or gender-based violence, is now widely recognized as an issue of public concern. It continues to occur, and remains a challenge to all communities across Canada.

It includes sexual harassment and assault, physical violence, stalking, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and the insecurity associated with the threat of violence.

Violence against women occurs in private and intimate relationships, work environments, and public spaces. It is not just about domestic violence, but also about women's safety in the community and the city.

Getting an accurate picture of the extent of such violence in our communities is not easy. Many women are reluctant to report incidents of public or private violence to the police or other authorities. Victimization surveys help to give a more reliable picture of the extent of violence experienced by women and girls, and their levels of insecurity.

- Intimate Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls
 - 460,000 women were sexually assaulted in one year — a rate of 3.5% per 100,000 for women over the age of 15.
 - Only 8% of these sexual assaults were reported to the police.
 - Women are at greater risk of serious spousal assault, stalking and homicide than men.
 - 83% of spousal assaults reported to the police involve males assaulting females.
 - In 2007, 51 women and 13 men were killed by their current or former spouse.
 - Aboriginal women are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of spousal assault.

- Safety in Public Space
 - 16% of women report feeling unsafe while walking alone in their urban area after dark, and 58% are worried about their safety while waiting for or using public transportation.
 - Over 500 women, many of them Aboriginal, have disappeared from towns and communities in Canada in recent years.
 - Adolescent girls and young adults are at greatest risk of sexual assault.

Insecurity and fear of violence or harassment can limit the mobility of women and girls, and restrict their work or educational choices.

Violence itself has huge social and economic costs for everyone in the municipality. Estimates of the health and social service costs of violence against women in Canada are **\$4.2 billion** a year.

Providing services for victims of intimate violence has rightly been a priority, as well as training local professionals such as the police and service workers to improve responses to incidents.

Less attention has been given to **preventing** intimate violence, and to preventing violence on the streets, at work and in public spaces. Prevention and treatment are both necessary, but prevention is more cost-effective.

Policies on intimate violence are often isolated from other municipal sectors, and from work to improve women's safety in public space. But public and private violence against women are closely linked, so policies need to be linked with other services such as housing, urban planning and transport. And because they both stem from attitudes towards women, prevention policies need to include both genders — men and women.

Municipalities do not always have good data about the extent of violence against women and levels of insecurity, and where they occur. The risk of violence against women includes individual, relationship, community and societal factors. Risks also vary between local neighbourhoods and communities. Women who are very isolated, recent immigrants, Aboriginal women, young women, elderly or disabled women, those working in the sex trade, may all be at risk in different ways.

The Role of Municipalities — A City Strategy

Ensuring women's safety in public or private requires a strategy with a *range of preventive approaches*. It is important to have strong and supportive national and provincial or territorial policies, but violence occurs in local communities so there is a major role for cities and local authorities.

Cities have worked in an integrated manner in partnerships to develop cross-sector initiatives including health services, situational and environmental approaches; public education campaigns to raise awareness about women's safety; protocols; skills training for local employees and professionals; and school curriculum programmes to help change attitudes and behaviour towards violence against women and girls.

Municipal Examples — 'A City which is Safe for Women is Safe for All'

The City of Montreal has had a city-community consultative working group on women's safety since the early 1990's. A range of services and programmes aim to increase feelings of safety for women on the streets, and reduce violence against women. These range from close co-operation with women's groups in the design and redevelopment of public areas such as Metro stations and parks, a guide on urban design for women's safety, the 'Between Two Stops' system which allows women to get off buses close to their destination

in the evenings. The organization *Pro-gram inc* works closely with the municipal police to provide front line service to men arrested for domestic violence; *Stella, Maimie's Friend* works closely with Montreal's social and health services to help prevent violence against sex trade workers.

The City of Toronto developed a municipal strategy document on preventing public violence against women in the 1980's and the 1991 *Take Back Toronto* initiative. It has worked closely with organizations such as METRAC, which developed the women's safety audit as a tool to empower women to work with municipalities to make their neighbourhoods safer.

The City of Ottawa, funds the *Women's Initiative for Safer Environments* (WISE), and works with the *City for All Women Initiative* (CAWI). WISE has used women's safety audits in local communities to analyze environments, and works with local government to improve safety; raise awareness about the personal safety of women and girls; and develop community action plans.

The Region of Waterloo established its *Family Violence Project* in 2006, bringing together ten different local partners in one place, including the police and municipal services, to provide better protection, responses and supports in domestic violence situations. There have been some immediate cost savings and improvements in services, public confidence and case resolution.

The City of Edmonton and Edmonton Police Service work in a number of cross-sector teams including *Spousal Violence Intervention and Elder Abuse*, and partner with a Community Initiatives Against Family Violence group. *Safedmonton's Sexual Exploitation Working Group* initiated a project to provide community support to women arrested on the street.

Public Awareness and Changing Attitudes

Community education programmes can be effective in changing attitudes towards violence. The City of Charlottetown *Family Violence Prevention Programme*, is a partnership approach under the strong leadership of the Mayor. The programme began in 2001 and includes a permanent Purple Ribbon on the town hall; training for all city staff, including elected officials, to raise awareness about violence; public advertisements on buses and city fire and utility vehicles; and a series of community events throughout the year. The Father and Sons event is sponsored by the private sector.

London, Ontario's *Mayor's Task Force to End Women Abuse* is implementing the Charlottetown approach. Almost 40 Ontario municipalities use the public awareness campaign *Neighbours, Friends and Family* to alert people to signs of intimate violence, and where they can seek help. The *Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System*, has supported the *Muslim Family Safety Project*, a community-based project working with local agencies to expand awareness and assist women from Muslim communities and backgrounds in domestic violence situations.

School-Based Programmes

Effective programmes to change attitudes through schools include curriculum-based programmes such as the Fourth 'R' in London, Ontario which is now implemented in 350 Ontario schools and six other provinces, the 'Roots of Empathy' implemented in a number of provinces, 'Vers le pacific' in Quebec, and the Saltspring Island, BC 'Education is Prevention' programme, which all aim to build healthy and non-violent gender relationships between girls and boys.

Networks to Share Experience and Tools

Women in Cities International (WICI) is an important resource supporting projects at the local government level. It has worked with women's organizations to build partnerships with municipal governments. A current project is looking at safety issues for Aboriginal women in Regina, elderly women in Gatineau, disabled women in Montreal, and recent immigrant communities in Peel.

Resources: Tools to Support Action

FCM, and the Cities of Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver have all produced guides on gender equality, and some on the use of women's safety audits. WICI maintains a website with a wide range of Canadian and international resources and tools. The *International Centre for the Prevention of Crime* (ICPC) similarly has good practice examples on its website.