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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Assessing the prevalence of violence against women in Canada

Submitted by Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada \*

ABSTRACT

1. Sound statistical data is critical for the development of appropriate policies, legislation and services for women affected by violence. Significant progress has been made in Canada over the past twelve years in the breadth and scope of surveys designed to assess the extent of violence against women and societal responses to it. Statistics Canada, the national statistical agency, has played a lead role in implementing prevalence surveys, police- and courts-based surveys, and surveys of shelters and other services for victims. Prevalence surveys are critical sources of information about the nature and extent of physical and sexual violence against women in the population; however, in conducting these surveys researchers must take account of complex methodological and ethical issues relating to emotional trauma, respondent safety,

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definitions of violence, and reducing response bias. Other sources of data, such as police, shelters and other services for abused women are important for describing how agencies respond to women who come to them for help. This paper argues that national statistical agencies have a leadership role to play in the design and implementation of surveys on violence against women to ensure that standards of scientific rigour are met and the work is done in an ethical manner.

## I. INTRODUCTION

2. Significant progress has been made in Canada over the past 12 years in the development of statistical data to assess the problem of violence against women. Statistics Canada, the national statistical agency, has been at the forefront of innovations that have served as models worldwide. Beginning in 1993, Statistics Canada undertook the first national prevalence survey on violence against women, based on a methodology carefully developed to take account of the ethical issues involved in interviewing women about this sensitive topic (Johnson 2001). Since that time, this methodology has formed the basis for similar surveys in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden and other countries (see for example Tjaden & Thoennes 2000; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996; Morris 1997; Heiskanen & Piispa 1998; Lundgren et al 2001), in addition to internationally comparable surveys coordinated through the World Health Organization (WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women) and the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (International Violence Against Women Survey).

## II. DATA SOURCES TO ASSESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

3. Through federal government funding, Statistics Canada has developed the capacity to assess the nature and extent of violence against women from the perspective of women themselves, incidents reported to the police, and to examine women's use of social service agencies. The following activities form a central component in research and policy making in Canada today (see Table 1 for details):

- (a) National prevalence surveys – the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS) comprehensively examined women's experiences of physical and sexual violence and sexual harassment committed by men, and perceptions of personal safety. A partner violence module was adapted from the VAWS and added to the ongoing General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS) in order to provide periodic estimates of violence against both women and men (with a reference period of the previous five years). The GSS is conducted every five years and includes a focus on sexual assault and other crimes within the past year. In the 2004 cycle, a module on stalking was also added.
- (b) Police statistics – the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey was expanded in the 1990s to identify gender and age of victims and offenders, victim-offender relationship and other details of criminal incidents. To date, 58% of all criminal incidents reported to police each year are captured on this revised system. Additional police departments adapt to the new system each year.
- (c) Homicide survey – also provided by police, this is a detailed survey on each homicide known to police. Spousal homicides have been identifiable since 1974 and in 1991 data elements were added to identify type of intimate partner



Homicide survey	Gender and age of victims and offenders, victim-offender relationship (includes marital partner, separated or divorced partner, common-law partner, dating partner) type of weapon, motive, history of domestic violence, homicides committed during a sexual assault, killing of prostitutes	Annual since 1974; greater detail on partner homicides from 1991
Sentencing statistics	Court outcomes including convictions, guilty pleas, acquittals, sentences in family violence and sexual assault cases	Pilot study of family violence cases in 2004; ongoing sentencing information on sexual assaults
Transition Home Survey	Number of women and children admitted to emergency and longer term shelters for abused women annually; detailed one-day snapshot of residents; services provided	Biannual since 1997; number of shelters since 1975
Victim Services Survey	Number of crime victims presenting to sexual assault centres and other support services for victims by gender	Biannual since 2003

### III. NATURE AND EXTENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

4. These data sources are analyzed and the results published in a variety of Statistics Canada publications, including the annual *Family Violence in Canada* (see AuCoin 2005). Datafiles are also made available to researchers inside and outside Statistics Canada which has resulted in a rich array of peer-reviewed scholarly articles (see for example Wilson, Johnson & Daly 1995; Gartner & Macmillan 1995; Brownridge 2004) The following brief summary profiles the nature and extent of violence against women and the response of the helping systems as portrayed by these data sources.

#### Prevalence

- Half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one episode of sexual or physical violence in their adult lifetime;
- Prevalence surveys suggest that rates of partner violence against women have decreased since 1993;
- Partner homicides have declined for both women and men.

#### Correlates and risk factors

Risk factors for partner violence and homicide include:

- being young;
- living in a common-law (de facto) relationship;
- separation;
- stalking;
- alcohol abuse by male partners;
- controlling behaviours on the part of male partners;
- witnessing violence in childhood raises the risk of both victimization and perpetration of partner violence.

#### Violence reported to police

- The rate of partner violence reported to the police has increased in recent years and survey data suggest this may be due to an increase in victim willingness to report these crimes to police;
- The rate of sexual assault reported to police increased until 1993 then declined significantly; it is not known how these trends might be affected by victim willingness to report to police.

#### Court sentencing of partner violence cases

- Partner violence cases were more likely to result in a probation order as compared with other violent cases, and less likely to result in prison or a fine;
- Treatment as a sentencing option has increased in specialized Domestic Violence Courts.

#### Women using emergency shelters

- The number of emergency shelters available to abused women in Canada increased from 18 in 1975 to 543 in 2004;
- In 2003/04, over 58,000 women and 36,000 children were admitted to shelters in Canada.

#### Non-residential services for victims of crime

- Sixty-two percent of all victims served by victim service agencies in 2003 were female victims of sexual assault, stalking or other forms of violence, the majority involving intimate partners or other family members.

5. This paper will focus primarily on Statistics Canada's experience in designing and conducting national prevalence surveys. It has four main objectives: (1) to present the challenges and benefits of this work; (2) to briefly present some of the more salient results of these surveys; (3) to assess the gaps in current data collection activities; and (4) to make recommendations for future work.

#### IV. CHALLENGES OF CONDUCTING NATIONAL PREVALENCE SURVEYS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

6. Prevalence surveys, in which random samples of women are interviewed about their experiences of violence, have emerged over the past decade as essential research and policy making tools. The first survey dedicated to interviewing women about their experiences of violence was developed by Statistics Canada in the early 1990s and conducted in 1993. A total of 12,300 women were interviewed by telephone about their experiences of sexual and physical violence and sexual harassment since the age of 16, the impacts of violence on their lives, including physical and emotional injury and fear of violent victimization, and formal and informal supports they turned to, including police.

7. Interviewing women directly about experiences of violence presents researchers with an array of complex methodological and ethical issues. These can be summarized as issues relating to emotional trauma, ensuring the safety of respondents, definitions of violence, and reducing response bias.

#### A. Emotional trauma

8. Prevalence surveys ask women to disclose intimate and potentially troubling details of their lives to a stranger over the telephone (the most common method used in developed countries; face-to-face interviewing is used in developing countries). Survey researchers must be aware of the fact that questions asking women to relive their experiences of violence have the potential to raise emotional trauma. It can be expected that, for many women, their first disclosure of violence will be to the interviewer. About one-quarter of women who reported sexual or physical violence to the VAWS had never reported it to anyone else prior to being interviewed for the survey. In order to respond to women who might be traumatized by the survey questions, interviewers in the VAWS were trained to detect and respond sensitively to emotional trauma and to refer women to support services. Interviewers had available to them a computerized list of shelters and other services for abused women across the country and these were linked to the respondent's geographic area. By offering contact information about services in the woman's area, interviewers were able to make concrete offers of assistance without compromising their role of collecting objective statistical data. This met the ethical responsibility of recognizing and responding to trauma and left interviewers feeling less helpless.

9. Survey researchers also have a responsibility to respond to emotional trauma on the part of interviewers who might be distressed by repeatedly hearing stories about violent victimization. This was addressed in two major ways: (1) through the method of selecting interviewers, and (2) through supports provided to them during their work on the survey. A clinical psychologist was part of the survey team and she helped screen interviewers on the basis of their knowledge and sensitivity toward the subject matter and their level of comfort discussing matters related to violence. Then, during the training period, the psychologist conducted stress reduction workshops to ensure interviewers had the skills necessary to work for many months on the survey. Throughout the interviewing period, she was available to interviewers to help with stress management and anything else that was troubling for them as a result of their work on the survey.

#### B. Safety

10. Women responding to prevalence surveys are selected at random and therefore interviewers will not know in advance when a woman is approached for an interview if she has had violence in her life or if she is currently living with a violent partner. Interviewers have an ethical responsibility not to endanger a woman whose violent partner may learn of the nature of the interview. Through training and experience, interviewers became skilled at detecting whether respondents had the necessary privacy to continue through to questions about violence and were able to speak freely and safely. Respondents were given options as to when and where they would participate. Some chose to reschedule the interview at a workplace or at a different time when they would have greater privacy. Women who undertook this option were not only those who were living with a violent partner, but were also those who had past experiences of violence that they had not disclosed, and did not want to risked being overheard by children or other family members. At the outset of each interview, respondents were provided a toll-free telephone number that they could use to call back to resume an interrupted interview or to check on the legitimacy of the survey. No call-backs were made into respondents' home, as is often the practice in surveys on other topics, which gave them control over their participation.

11. Many women took advantage of the call-back option. In the 1993 survey, a total of 1,000 calls were received over the five month interviewing period and 150 were from women wanting to continue an uncompleted interview or wanting to add information they were unable to provide due to privacy concerns. The remainder of calls were from women wanting to confirm the legitimacy of the survey, usually at the point of sensitive questions about violence, or had questions about how they could obtain the results. Some called to commend the government on conducting the survey and taking the issue seriously.

#### C. Definitions of violence

12. Definitions of violence vary cross-culturally and even within cultures. It is therefore critical that prevalence surveys ask about experiences with violence in behavioural terms, not simply whether respondents have been the victims of 'violence' or have ever been 'assaulted' or 'sexually assaulted'. Providing multiple opportunities for disclosure helps counter the reluctance or hesitance of many women to talk about their experiences. Single questions have been shown to undercount rates of partner violence and sexual violence, which women are naturally reluctant to discuss. Both reliability and validity will be affected if respondents interpret question wording differently to other respondents and if large numbers fail to disclose. For these reasons, a list of behavioural items is the preferred approach.

13. Violence by marital partners was addressed somewhat differently than violence perpetrated by other men. In order to examine in detail the broad range of violent acts perpetrated by spouses and live-in partners, the following was read out:

We are particularly interested in learning more about women's experiences of violence in their homes. I would like you to tell me if your husband/partner has ever done any of the following to you. This includes incidents that may have occurred while you were dating.

- (a) Threatened to hit you with his fist or anything else that could hurt you
- (b) Threw something at you that could hurt you
- (c) Pushed, grabbed or shoved you
- (d) Slapped you
- (e) Kicked, bit or hit you with his fist
- (f) Hit you with something that could hurt you
- (g) Beat you up
- (h) Choked you
- (i) Threatened to or used a gun or knife on you
- (j) Forced you into any sexual activity when you did not want to, by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way

14. Preceding this section addressing marital partner violence were questions about physical and sexual violence committed by other categories of men, including strangers, dates and boyfriends and other known men. Questions were asked separately for each relationship category. Under Canadian criminal law, a very broad range of acts qualify as sexual assault, from unwanted sexual touching to sexual violence resulting in serious injury. Penetration is not an essential component. The following two questions were used to estimate sexual assault:

- Has a (male stranger, other known man) ever touched you against your will in any sexual way, such as unwanted touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling?
- Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other known man) ever forced you or attempted to force you into any sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way?

15. Question wording was carefully tested with focus groups of women seeking help through sexual assault centres and shelters for abused women. Unwanted sexual touching in the context of dating or marital relationships was found to be potentially ambiguous and consequently the decision was made to limit questioning about sexual violence in intimate relationships to forced sexual activity. Respondents therefore were not asked the first of these two questions with respect to dates or boyfriends.

16. The following questions were used to measure physical violence by men other than marital partners and were asked separately for each relationship category:

- Now I'm going to ask you some questions about physical attacks you may have had since the age of 16. By this I mean any use of force such as being hit, slapped, kicked or grabbed to being beaten, knifed or shot. Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other known man) ever physically attacked you?
- The next few questions are about face-to-face threats you may have experienced. By threats I mean any time you have been threatened with physical harm, since you were 16. Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other known man) ever threatened to harm you? Did you believe he would do it?

17. These detailed questions permit analysis of the nature and extent of sexual and physical violence, separately and combined, for a range of relationship categories, from intimate partner to stranger, since the age of 16.

#### D. Reducing response bias

18. At the time of the development of this survey in the early 1990s, it was a common belief among researchers and women's advocates that large numbers of women would refuse to report honestly on their experiences of victimization, that violence therefore would be undercounted on the survey, and that the results would work against efforts to obtain funding for victim support services. Statistics Canada responded to these and other concerns about trauma and safety through an extensive consultation process with a wide variety of stakeholders across the country, including shelter workers, crisis counsellors, victims of violence seeking help through these services, as well as academics, government representatives, and a police advisory group. These groups helped to develop innovative approaches that are sensitive to the women responding and would give respondents options as to when and where they would participate, thus encouraging participation and candid disclosures of violence.

19. Due to the nature of the VAWS and concerns about women's safety, repeat calls were not made to try to 'convert' those who refused to participate. A lower than average response rate was accepted (64% compared with an average of 82% for Statistics Canada household surveys). In order to reduce non-response to sensitive questions, question wording was developed and



carefully tested with women who had been affected by violence and their counsellors and advocates, as well as in two large pilot tests with respondents selected at random. Careful selection and training of interviewers is also considered to be important for building trust and rapport with respondents and reducing non-response. Experience in Canada, and now other countries, has shown that if the right care and precautions are taken, women will be willing to discuss their experiences of violence and reliable data can be obtained.

## V. BENEFITS OF PREVALENCE SURVEYS

20. The benefits of prevalence surveys are now well known internationally. This is the only method through which reliable estimates of the nature and extent of violence against women can be obtained and form an important complement to administrative statistics obtained through police, courts and hospitals. The importance of the VAWS was far-reaching both in a methodological sense and the impact it had on expanding awareness and understanding of the issue. For example, the VAWS can be credited with:

- (a) Making a significant and sustained impact on public awareness of the extent, nature and dynamics of sexual and physical violence against women
- (b) Providing detailed data on the nature and extent of violence against women for the first time to criminal justice practitioners, medical practitioners, service providers, legislators and researchers
- (c) Making available detailed data on correlates and risk markers for violence that has been used to better understand the dynamics of violence and to design prevention programs
- (d) Significantly enhancing the science of interviewing on sensitive topics
- (e) Making available to researchers internationally a methodology that takes account of the ethical considerations involved in this type of research

21. Prior to the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, reliable data on women's experiences of violence was unavailable. Crime victimization surveys were regularly undertaken in Canada, but underestimated the rate of physical and sexual assault on women because of their omnibus approach, lack of sensitivity in question wording, and lack of training for interviewers and consideration for the safety of respondents (Johnson 1996). Specialized prevalence surveys have become the accepted method to meet the demand for reliable statistical information on violence against women.

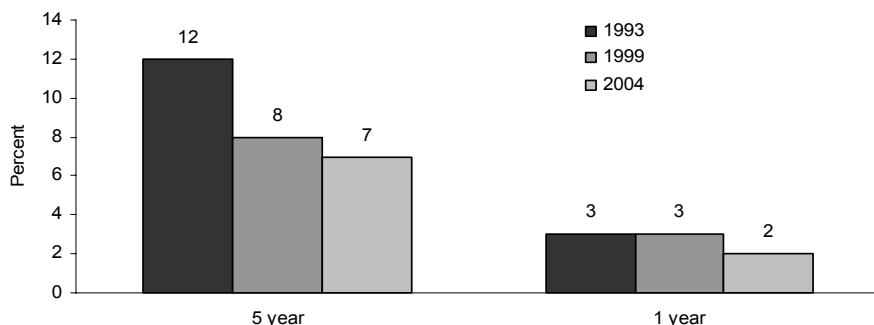
## VI. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESULTS OF PREVALENCE SURVEYS

22. The 1993 VAWS estimates that one-half of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. A total of 29% of women who had ever been married or lived in a common-law (de facto) relationship had been the victims of violence by a marital partner. 16% were assaulted by dates or boyfriends, 23% by other known men, and 23% by male strangers. Sexual assaults and physical assaults occurred in almost equal frequency (39% and 34% of women, respectively).

23. The 1999 and 2004 General Social Surveys on Victimization provide updated estimates of the level of partner violence using the same module of questions used in the VAWS to define partner violence. The focus of the GSS was on the five years prior to the interview in contrast to

the VAWS, which focused on experiences since age 16. According to the 2004 GSS, 7% of women were victims of partner violence in the previous five years and 3% were victimized in the previous year. For comparison, results of the VAWS can be scoped to the five-year period prior to that survey. As shown in Figure 1, there were statistically significant declines in the percentage of women who reported violence in 2004 and 1999 compared with 1993 — from 12% to 8% to 7%. However, the percentage of women who reported experiencing partner violence in the one-year period prior to these surveys remained unchanged.

Figure 1 Five-year and one-year rates of spousal violence, 1993, 1999 and 2004



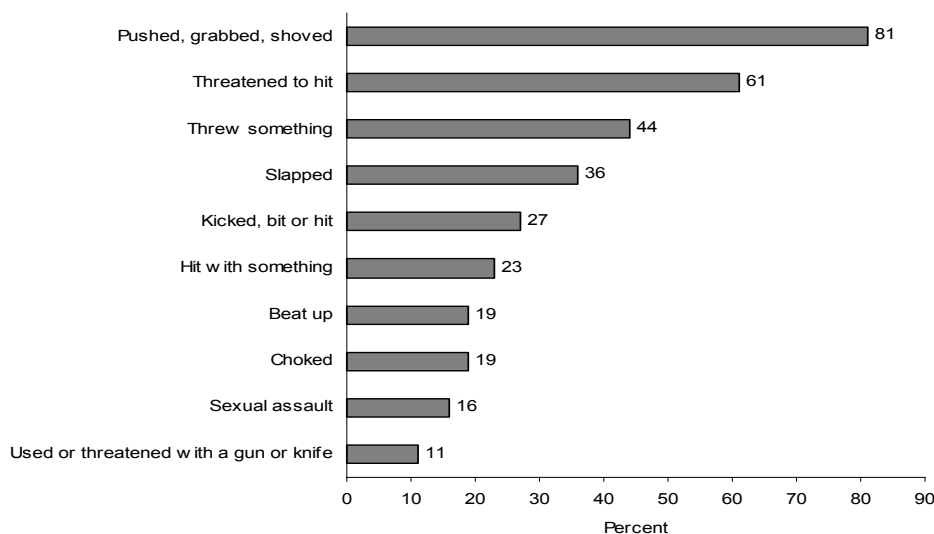
Differences in five-year rates are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

Differences in one-year rates are not statistically significant.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Violence Against Women Survey 1993; General Social Survey on Victimization 1999 and 2004

24. Figure 2 shows the percentage of partner violence victims who experienced each of the ten types of violence during the five-year period. A majority of women reported more than one type of violence. Most common were being pushed, grabbed or shoved, being threatened with violence, or having something thrown at them. However, looking at each woman by the most serious type of violence experienced, only 11% said they were threatened or had something thrown at them. Forty percent were beaten up, choked, had a gun or knife used against them, or were sexually assaulted.

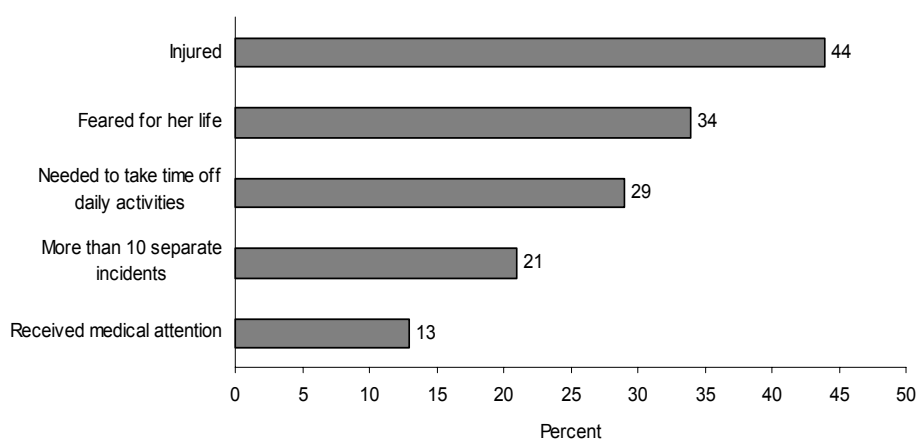
Figure 2: Types of spousal assaults on women



Refers to violence over the previous five years.  
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization 2004

25. Indicators of the impacts and consequences of violence for women are essential detail on prevalence surveys. Among the Canadian women who in 2004 reported partner violence to the GSS, 44% had been physically injured and 34% feared for their lives (Figure 3). For three-in-ten women, the effects of the violence resulted in having to take time from paid or unpaid work. One-fifth suffered more than ten episodes of violence and 13% received medical attention for injuries.

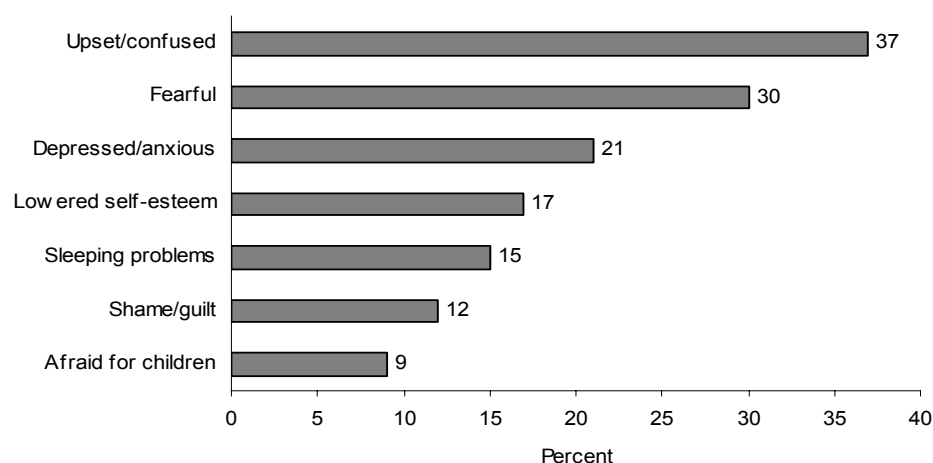
Figure 3: Impacts and consequences of spousal assaults on women



Refers to violence over the previous five years.  
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization 2004

26. Emotional and psychological impacts of violence can be even more devastating and long lasting than physical injury. The most common emotional effects cited by female victims of spousal violence were being upset or confused and suffering from heightened levels of fear (Figure 4). Many also suffered depression or anxiety, low self-esteem, and sleeping problems as a direct result of the violence. Twelve percent felt ashamed or guilty about the violence inflicted against them. Forty percent of all female victims said their children had witnessed the violence against them, and one-in-ten were afraid for their children's safety.

Figure 4: Emotional impacts of spousal assaults on women



Refers to violence over the previous five years.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Victimization 2004

27. Prevalence surveys can be helpful in identifying the way in which women use criminal justice and social services in their communities. With repeated surveys changes can be tracked over time, providing important information for the interpretation of trends in administrative statistics. According to the GSS, 36% of women assaulted by partners reported the assault to the police in 2004 and 37% in 1999, higher proportions compared with 1993 when 29% reported to police (in the five years preceding the survey). This suggests that any increase in police-reported assaults on women in the 1990's can be attributed, in part, to an increase in the number of women reporting to police.

## VII. GAPS IN CURRENT DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

28. The 1993 Violence Against Women Survey emerged from the traditional crime victimization surveys. It was an innovation that was funded by the federal Department of Health under a special Family Violence Initiative at a cost of almost \$2 million (CAD). The results made a major contribution to research and policy at all levels of government and over time there was a recognized need for updated data to assess change in prevalence, reporting to police and use of services. In the absence of funding to repeat this survey, and in the face of ongoing demand for detailed data, portions of the VAWS were incorporated into Statistics Canada's crime victimization survey, which is repeated at five-year intervals. Based on lessons learned from the VAWS, the methodology for the General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS) was modified to accommodate special selection and training of interviewers, supports for respondents and interviewers, as well as the detailed module of questions used to address partner violence on the VAWS. The GSS addresses a range of other crimes and criminal justice issues, so could not accommodate the breadth of questions included on the VAWS. Decisions were made to focus in detail on partner violence, adapting questions directly from the VAWS, and to consider additions and modifications with each cycle to respond to emerging issues. In 2004, the Canadian GSS included a module of questions on stalking which permits an examination of the interconnections between threats, physical violence, sexual violence and stalking by intimate partners. This is a model similar to that adopted by the British Crime Survey which has included modules on sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking (see Walby & Allen 2004).

29. Adapting the GSS to accommodate a methodology to address violence against women has the advantage of having data on partner violence available at regular intervals so that comparisons can be made over time. However, in the transition from a fully-fledged survey on the diverse aspects of violence against women to a partner violence module on a general victimization survey, some of the strengths of the VAWS were compromised. For example:

- (a) Sexual assault is no longer well addressed. The GSS measures the prevalence of sexual assault during the year prior to the survey only (consistent with the approach taken for other crime types on the GSS) and without the detail included on the VAWS.
- (b) Sexual harassment has been dropped. This is an aspect of women's experiences that has a direct impact on feelings of vulnerability to violence and analysis of fear is compromised if sexual harassment is not taken into account.
- (c) The GSS is conducted at five-year intervals. This is too infrequent to detect year-over-year change.
- (d) The GSS focused on partner violence within the previous five years. Surveys need to capture adult lifetime experiences in order to examine long-term ongoing abuse, violence occurring after separation, and police and court responses to violence which can take many years to resolve.
- (e) The partner violence module on the GSS focuses on marital and common-law (de facto) relationships. It does not conform to currently accepted definitions of "intimate partner violence" which also include dating relationships.

30. In addition, the GSS interviews women in English and French only. It excludes large numbers of immigrant women who are not proficient in either language or who are not familiar or comfortable with survey research, homeless women, those living in shelters at the time of the interview, those without telephones or with mobile phones only, many of whom may be fleeing violence. The survey methodology also does not lead itself to addressing other important forms of violence against women, such as trafficking and forced prostitution. Women in these situations are not easily available to be interviewed and will require specially targeted studies as opposed to random surveys of the population. Reliability of the results of prevalence surveys will be affected to the extent that women who did not participate differ from those who did. Ongoing efforts are needed to reach women who are excluded from prevalence surveys and who may be particularly vulnerable to violence.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

31. The following are intended as ideas to assist in the development of a national action plan on enhancing data collection on violence against women.

### Prevalence surveys

- (i) National prevalence surveys are critical for evaluating the extent and nature of violence against women, risk factors and correlates of violence, impacts and consequences of these experiences, decisions made by victims to obtain help, as well as perceptions of the criminal justice system and other helping agencies. Countries need to develop the capacity and expertise to conduct prevalence surveys with scientific rigour and to make results broadly available.

- (ii) National statistical agencies have an important leadership role to play in the design and undertaking of prevalence surveys to ensure that high standards are met and that high quality data are produced that will be useful to a wide range of stakeholders. A central role is recommended for national statistical agencies due to:
  - (a) the rigorous standards required in the areas of questionnaire design, sampling, weighting and data analysis
  - (b) the infrastructure needed to carry out large and highly complex data collection
  - (c) the credibility and legitimacy of statistical agencies as a result of their extensive experience and degree of specialization among members
  - (d) their reputation for objectivity which increases confidence in survey results by stakeholders and data users
  - (e) their experience in ensuring consistency of data concepts that conform to international standards.
- (iii) Internationally recognized concepts or modules need to be integrated into national surveys, and established best practices should be utilized that take account of the diverse ethical considerations involved in doing this work. Adherence to international principles will help ensure high quality data, facilitate international comparisons, and provide a reliable monitoring tool.
- (iv) Many innovations have been made over the past decade to approach women sensitively and ethically and these efforts have paid off. New innovations are now required to adapt these methodologies to hard-to-reach women and other important forms of violence, such as trafficking and forced prostitution.

#### Other data sources

32. Notwithstanding the central importance of prevalence surveys, other data sources have a valuable contribution to make toward understanding both the dynamics of violence and societal responses to it. For example:

- (v) Homicide surveys monitor trends and patterns in lethal violence and with sufficient detail can help police and other services identify interventions that will help reduce intimate partner killings. Canadian homicide data show that in a majority of partner killings there was a history of domestic violence, that separation can trigger killings of women, and that young separating women are at highest risk. Together with what is known from prevalence surveys about the cycle of violence, low rates of reporting to police, and the large percentage of abused women who fear for their lives, detailed information about the dynamics of partner homicide can help educate women about escalating risk of serious violence. It can also help police and other agencies develop intervention strategies to help prevent an escalation of violence to homicide.

33. Detailed annual homicide data can also be paired with socio-demographic data to help understand possible societal-level factors contributing to trends in partner homicides. Canadian and US studies have found a correlation between declines in spousal homicide rates and improvements in women's social status, changes in legislation, policies and procedures designed to assist victims, and increases in the availability of emergency shelters and counseling services for women (Pottie Bunge 2002; Dugan et al 1999).

- (vi) Although statistics tracking assaults reported to police cannot be used as a measure of prevalence due to the low rate at which women report violence to police, they are useful for assessing demand for criminal justice resources and the response of police to the cases reported to them. Prevalence surveys provide an important complement to police statistics to determine how changes in incidents of violence reported to police are linked to changes in victim willingness to report. Police statistical systems need to be sufficiently broad to assess the extent of repeat victimization and repeat offenders in the cases that are brought to them. They also need to be able to identify the response of police to cases of violence, including case dismissal, charges laid, referrals made to specialized services, peace bonds ordered, and other protections provided to victims.
- (vii) Detailed information is needed about the court response to violence against women, including convictions or acquittals, type of sentence, treatment ordered, bail granted or denied, charges reduced, supports for victims provided at court, and protection orders. Counts of repeat offending and repeat victimization are needed to assess the effectiveness of criminal justice responses.
- (viii) Information about the range of services available for victims, and victims' use of these services, is needed to assess the level of support for women in the community and the adequacy of these supports. This will provide indicators of the number of women seeking counselling services for the emotional impact of violence, as well as the number of women and their children who are admitted to emergency shelters fleeing abuse, and the number who are turned away. Counts of repeat admissions to shelters and other services are needed as indicators of the severity of the problem and the profile of women using these services.
- (ix) Information on the number of women presenting to hospitals for medical treatment for injuries resulting from violence is needed as an indicator of the severity of the problem, demand for health services resulting from violence, and the portion of health costs that are due to violence.
- (x) Male controlling behaviours have been identified as primary predictors of perpetrating sexual and physical violence against women (Johnson 2001). Fundamental changes in attitudes toward women and their place in society are essential if violence is to be prevented and reduced. Many public awareness and violence prevention efforts have changing attitudes as their primary focus. Public attitude surveys are needed to monitor shifts in attitudes as a measure of progress in this area.

34. In Canada, prevalence surveys on violence against women have become a mainstay for research and formulating public policy. A wide array of other data sources have also been developed to address the need for information about the response of criminal justice and social services and women's use of services. But significant challenges remain in our ability to ensure that all types of violence are measured and the experiences of all women in Canadian society are included. Continued efforts are needed to improve the range and depth of data available to monitor levels of violence, and societal responses to it.

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