

Canada's Approach to Addressing Family Violence

Jessica Laurin

Policy Analyst, Public Health Agency of Canada

March 2017

PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING CANADIANS
TO IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH



Family Violence in Canada

Family violence includes:

- **Child maltreatment** refers to any form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect against children 18 years old and younger. It also includes direct witnessing or indirect knowledge of violence against parents.
- **Intimate partner violence** refers to any form of physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse by a current or former partner or spouse.
- **Elder abuse** refers to any form of physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse by a member of the family against a person 65 years old and older.



Family violence accounts for **26%** of police reported violent crime in Canada. (Statistics Canada, 2017)

30%

of adult women in Canada experienced physical or sexual abuse or direct witnessing/indirect knowledge of violence against parents before the age of 16. (Affifi, 2014)

34%

of women who experience spousal violence reported being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked or threatened with a gun or a knife. (Statistics Canada, 2016)

Health and Social Impact of Family Violence

- Family violence is a public health issue
- Family violence can cause a range of serious physical and mental health impact across the lifespan
- Family violence can also affect people's social or economic situations

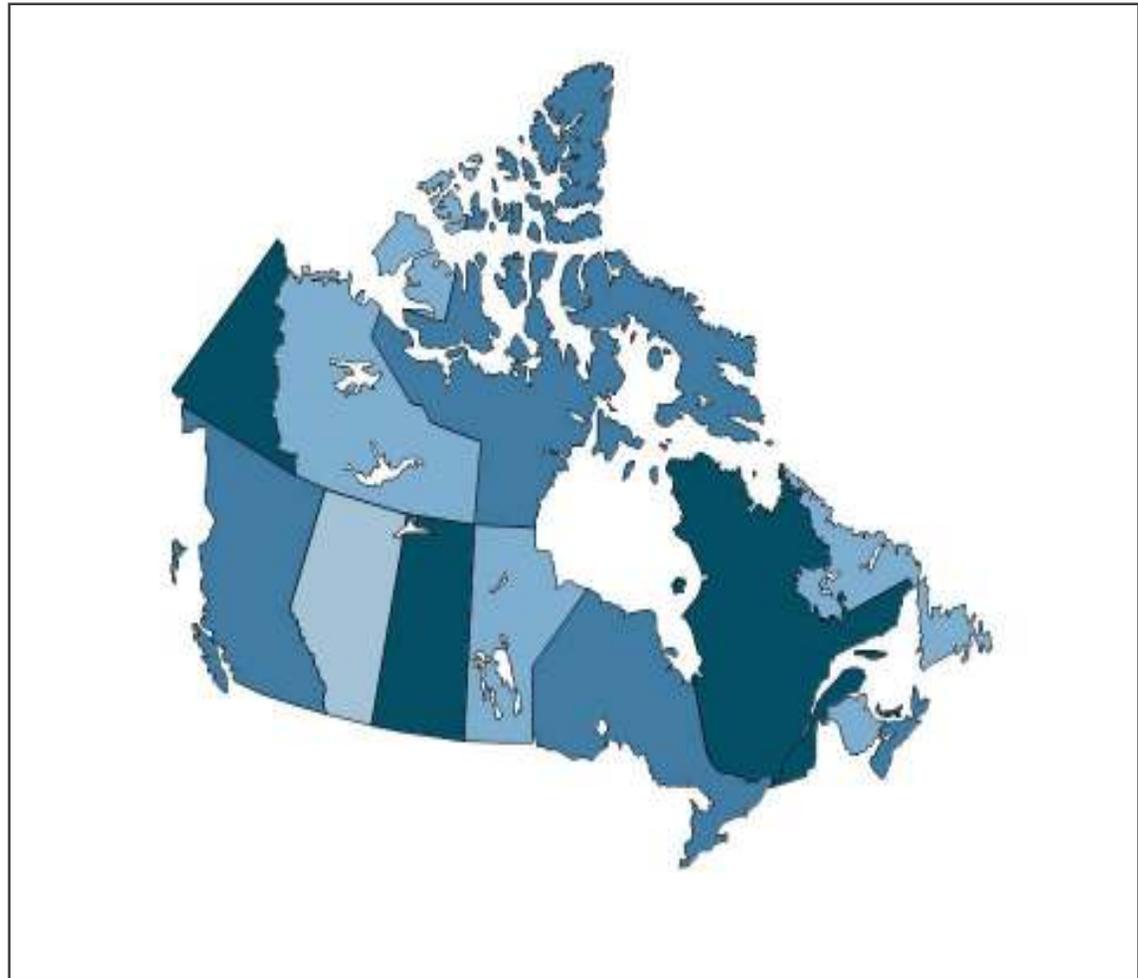
Impacts of family violence across the lifespan¹

Injury	Anxiety	Attempted suicide	Post-traumatic stress disorder	Depression & loneliness
Less control of emotions	Behavioural problems	Obesity	Diseases & pain	Shorter life
Problems with parent-child bonding	Failure at school	Anti-social behaviour (Conduct disorder)	Trouble with relationships	Dependence
Delays in growth & development	Problems with friendships	Alcohol & drug use	Lack of stable employment	Financial problems
		Other risky behaviours		
Infants	Children	Teenagers	Adults	Older Adults

¹Adapted from: MacMillan, HL, Wathen, CN. (2014).

Canadian Context

- Federated state
- Shared responsibility between the Government of Canada and its 13 Provinces and Territories



Provinces and Territories Responsibilities

- Provinces and Territories are responsible for delivering services across sectors

Health	Justice	Social Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical and mental health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to legal aid services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Front-line social services<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Victims Assistance Centres- Child protection services- Social assistance services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sex health education to youth through school curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Municipal and provincial policies enforce laws, prevent crime and protect the public	

Federal Responsibilities

- Provide leadership and coordination on the issue of family violence
- Provide national guidance and standards for professionals
- Adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address family violence
- Collaborate across sectors to prevent and respond to family violence
 - Family violence Initiative
 - Federal Gender-Based Violence Strategy
 - National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Public Health Approach to Address Family Violence

1. Prevention: Maternal Child Health Programs
2. Response: Trauma-informed Health Promotion Programs
3. Equipping Professionals

1. Prevention: Maternal Child Health programs

- Offered in more than 800 sites across Canada and reach more than 5,000 communities.
- Aim at promoting healthy child development and support vulnerable children and their families.
- Support positive parenting, parent-child involvement, attachment, resilience and healthy relationships. These are all protective factors that are associated with a reduced risk of family violence
- Serve as important points of access where women living in situations of abuse and violence may be referred to more specialized intervention services.

2. Response: Trauma-Informed Health Promotion Programs

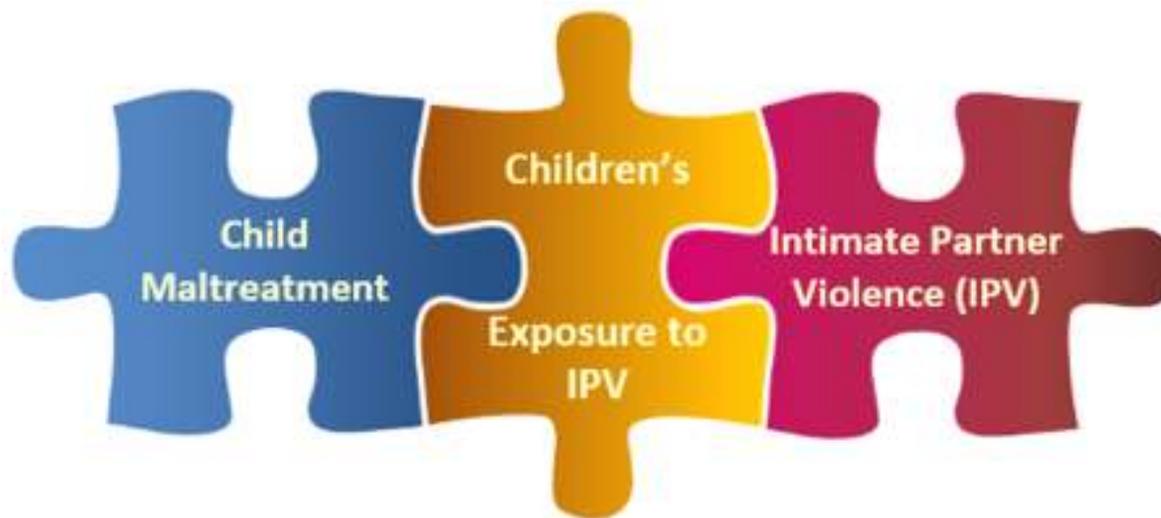
- Support community-based health promotion programs to improve the physical and mental health of survivors of family violence
- Recognise that multiple forms of violence can be experienced through the life course
 - Child maltreatment
 - Children witnessing violence against parents
 - Dating violence
 - Intimate partner violence

2. Response: Trauma-informed health promotion programs (continued)

- Promising intervention programs to support survivors of family violence:
 - Building connections: A Group Intervention for Mothers and Children Experiencing Violence in Relationships
 - Reaching out with Yoga: Trauma-informed Yoga for Women and Children in Shelters
 - Inunnguiniq: Intervention to Support High-Risk Families who Experience Family Violence in Nunavut
 - Safe and Understood: Helping mothers and children restore attachment and mental health; fathers change beliefs and behaviours
 - STEP: Supporting the transition to and engagement in parenthood in adults who experienced maltreatment as children

3. Equipping Professionals

- Need to build capacity of health professionals
- Develop guidance and curricula
- Violence Evidence Guidance Action (VEGA) project



Good Practices and Lessons Learned

- Adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address family violence
- Recognize the intersection between forms of violence across the life course.
- Build capacities of professionals across sectors to recognize and safely respond to violence.
- Create communities of practice to link researchers, policy makers and service providers to help move knowledge to practice.

Reference

- Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H. L., Boyle, M., Taillieu, T., Cheung, K., & Sareen, J. (2014). Child abuse and mental disorders in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 186(9), E324-E332.
- Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2017). “Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2015.” *Juristat*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.
- MacMillan, HL, Wathen, CN. (2014). Research Brief: Interventions to Prevent Child Maltreatment. PreVAiL: Preventing Violence Across the Lifespan Research Network (PDF document)External Link. London, ON.
- Stop Family Violence (2017). <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sfv-avf/index-eng.php>
- Violence Evidence Guidance Action (2016). <https://projectvega.ca/>