Canada’s Approach to Addressing Family Violence

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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 lifespan**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Social Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Physical and mental health services</td>
<td>• Access to legal aid services</td>
<td>• Front-line social services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sex health education to youth through school curricula</td>
<td>• Municipal and provincial policies enforce laws, prevent crime and protect the public</td>
<td>- Victims Assistance Centres</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Child protection services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Social assistance services</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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


