

Violence against Women

I. What is violence against women?

Violence against women does not mean only physical violence. It is much broader and includes sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. The National Plan targets two main types of violence against women – domestic and family violence, and sexual assault.

On an international level, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides the following definition:

'The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.'

II. What are the causes of violence against women?

Many of the misconceptions surrounding violence against women centre on its causes. There are a number of myths that exist, such as:

- men can't control their anger or sexual urges;
- alcohol causes men to be violent;
- women could leave violent partners if they wanted to; and
- men experience equal, if not greater, levels of violence perpetrated by their partners or former partners.

Research has shown that the significant drivers of violence against women include:

- the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women; and
- an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles and identities i.e., what it means to be masculine and feminine.

Attitudes that condone or tolerate violence are recognised as playing a central role in shaping the way individuals, organisations and communities respond to violence. VicHealth has summarised five key categories of violence supportive attitudes that arise from research. These include attitudes that:

- justify violence against women, based on the notion that it is legitimate for a man to use violence against a woman;
- excuse violence by attributing it to external factors (such as stress) or proposing that men cannot be held fully responsible for violent behaviour (for example, because of anger or sexual urges);
- trivialise the impact of violence, based on the view that the impacts of violence are not serious or are not sufficiently serious to warrant action by women themselves, the community or public agencies;
- minimise violence by denying its seriousness, denying that it occurs or denying that certain behaviours are indeed violence at all; and
- shift blame for the violence from the perpetrator to the victim or hold women at least partially responsible for their victimisation or for preventing victimisation.

III. Types of violence against women

There are many types of violence. All of them are harmful and can “work together” to enforce power and control over the woman enduring abuse.

- ***Physical Violence:*** hitting, slapping, choking, punching, kicking, pushing, grabbing, throwing, burning, hair-pulling, twisting arms, tripping, confinement, use of weapons
- ***Sexual Violence:*** Sexual assault (forced sexual activity), refusal to use protection from STIs or unwanted pregnancy, forced abortions, unwanted sexual touching, exposing to pornography without consent, sharing private photos without consent. Rape culture makes sexual violence seem “acceptable”
- ***Emotional or Psychological Violence:*** isolating her from others, creating fear, threatening to report her to authorities, manipulating her feel like she is “crazy”
- ***Financial or Economic Violence:*** controlling access to finances and bank accounts, withholding money, denying the right to work, forcing her to do precarious work against her wishes
- ***Forced Marriage:*** forcing women or girls into a marriage without their consent
- ***Neglect:*** withholding food, care or medication, stopping verbal communication
- ***Electronic Violence:*** cyberstalking or bullying, using electronic devices, phones or computers and social media to monitor or intimidate
- ***Verbal Violence:*** yelling, swearing, using degrading language and put-downs
- ***Spiritual Violence:*** denying access to spiritual or religious practices, mocking or degrading spiritual beliefs, forcing a belief system, manipulating belief systems to justify violence
- ***Harassment or Stalking:*** Unwanted and persistent following, watching, and monitoring, invading privacy. This includes monitoring by siblings, extended family, and community members who “report back” to the abuser

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- ***Using Children:*** threats or actions to take children away or have them removed, threats or actual harm to children, using children to relay abusive messages or threats
- ***Human Trafficking:*** recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving people by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, coercion, deception, or repeated provision of a controlled substance) for an illegal purpose, including sexual exploitation or forced labour

IV. Why Do We Need to Take Action on Violence Against Women?

People are demanding action on violence against women. Here's why:

- **It's a global problem:** 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical violence and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (World Health Organization)
- **It's a problem in Canada:** every 6 days, at least one woman is killed by her partner (Canadian Women's Foundation)
- **Most people know a survivor:** 67% of Canadians know at least one woman who has been physically or sexually assaulted (Canadian Women's Foundation)
- **Many people would not intervene:** 55.8% of people in Ontario would intervene if they saw a woman with bruises or injuries and suspected the partner was the cause (Interval House)
- **Most people do not report it:** Out of every 1000 sexual assaults in Canada, only 33 are reported to police and 3 lead to conviction (YWCA Canada)