



REPORT ON THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN QUESTIONNAIRE

The "Violence Against Women" project grew out of a presentation by Andrea Levan, Regional Director Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Ontario North and Professor of Women's Studies at Laurentian University. Andrea pointed out that much of the CFUW's current lobbying is reactive and suggested that we should be proactive. Club members across the province could find out what is going on in their communities, and what front-line workers feel *ought* to be going on, around violence toward women. To accomplish this, Andrea designed a nine-item open-ended questionnaire (copy attached) to examine this multifaceted issue.

This questionnaire was administered by CFUW volunteers to front-line representatives of thirty different organizations (Spring and Summer 2006). Although these organizations differ in their specific missions (e.g., women's shelter, sexual assault centre, immigrant women's services, community legal clinic), and hence view the system from different vantage points, they all deal in some direct way with violence toward women. Accordingly, this report will seek and emphasize areas of commonality that cut across specific agencies.

Needs and Issues Identified

Virtually all responders identify **inadequate funding** for a variety of programs as a primary need. These programs include among others child care, housing (especially for women trying to escape abusive relationships), and specialized services (e.g. immigrant, Aboriginal, substance addicted women).

A second major area of concern might be called issues of **public awareness**. This includes concern that neither governments nor the public at large regard violence against women as the pervasive phenomenon the respondents see it as being. Some respondents expressed their sense that public awareness of violence against women seems actually to have decreased in recent years, and funding cutbacks have left agencies without the time or resources to do outreach or public education. Several respondents spoke of the need to change the governments' understanding of the individual and societal impact of violence against women, based as it is on gender inequality. More programs are needed to focus attitudes and values through the educational and public health systems.

Also expressed by several respondents was a need for a **stronger, tighter, more comprehensive legal system** which will be more supportive of victims and more punitive of abusers. They identify a need for the legal and police services to “buy in” to the laws protecting women.

Finally, there was a wish strongly expressed for **reliable funding** for programs which have proven value, and less focus on “trendy” issues.

It may be worth mentioning that this question on needs and issues (question 1) generated by far the greatest number of responses – 82 needs and issues across 30 respondents. A later question, on useful changes in place (question 4) generated exactly half this number, plus several stern injunctions to continue working hard. Clearly, the work remaining is seen as far exceeding the work accomplished.

How can CFUW help?

The vast majority of answers to this question fall under one or both of the following headings: lobbying/advocacy and increased public awareness. Two individual responses summarize these concerns particularly aptly:

“Advocate, advocate, advocate. Lobby parliament for changes. Be in the news. Hold a rally. Create a ruckus.”

and

“Lobby, lobby, lobby. Educate, inform, train. Bring this issue to everyone you can. We need this issue to create a tipping point – a solid universal response that deems any violence against women and children as unacceptable and intolerable.”

In addition to the nearly universal calls for lobbying/advocacy and increased public awareness, there were a **number of more specific things that respondents thought groups like CFUW can do around violence against women**. These are listed here in no particular order.

1. Recognize the violence as it is! - not domestic or family abuse.
2. Don't put the victim in more danger. She is the expert on her safety.
3. Work closely with each county's domestic violence group throughout Ontario and the country.
4. Connect with teenagers regarding violence.
5. Publicize the need for corrective change (better lighting, emergency

signals, video monitoring) to ensure safety in public areas.

6. Letter writing.
7. Sharing information from front-line practitioners.
8. Have guest speakers on the topic of violence.
9. Be accessible to isolated women: get on line; have toll-free numbers; have directories of lawyers who specialize in family law involving abuse.
10. Be interested, be thoughtful, be current, be knowledgeable.
11. Practical help - e.g. providing clothing for women having job interviews; donating items needed for women setting up housekeeping away from an abuser; volunteering; serving as a board member.

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Stop Violence Against Women Sub-Committee
CFUW Ontario Council

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Appendix 1**CFUW Clubs and Agencies participating:**

Barrie	Simcoe County Sexual Assault Centre AIDS Committee of Simcoe County
Leaside-East York	YWCA Toronto Women's Shelter Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office Metropolitan Toronto Police
Muskoka	Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services Lake Country Community Legal Clinic
Nepean	Nepean Community Resource Centre
North Toronto	Canadians Against Violence in Entertainment Toronto District School Board YWCA Arise
Oakville	Sexual Assault & Violence Intervention Services of Halton
Orangeville	Family Transition Place
Orillia	Couchiching Jubilee House Green Haven Women's Centre The Elizabeth Fry Society of Simcoe County Simcoe County Health Unit – Orillia branch New Path Partner Abuse Program
Ottawa	Immigrant Women's Services Ottawa Western Ottawa Resource Centre (Pinecrest Queensway Health & Community) Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre Harmony House Cornerstone Women's Shelter Interval House Native Women's Association of Canada Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre
Perth & District	Perth Police Services Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence for Lanark County
Stratford	A Second Stage Shelter

Appendix 2

SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS:

What do you see as the most important needs that could be addressed by changes in law or government policy?

What aspects of current law or policy are problematic in meeting the needs of women?

Are there examples (specific cases without names) that illustrate your concerns?

What are the most useful and significant changes that have occurred?

What, if any, changes have been detrimental?

What issues still persist despite years of working in the area?

What problems exist for women in accessing and receiving help or services from various agencies?

Are there other important issues that have not been addressed that you would like to mention?

What can groups like CFUW do?

Appendix 3

A PROJECT FOR ONTARIO CLUBS: INFORMATION GATHERING ON ISSUES RELATED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A sample of answers

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1. What do you see as the most important needs that could be addressed by changes in law or government policy?

- There are difficulties accessing social assistance –it is slow, requires documents that aren't always readily available
- Counseling offered by the courts does not meet the needs
- Sentencing does not match the crime, and there needs to be follow-up on offenders
- Mandatory training of judges should be implemented
- With respect to family law, there should be a policy of no mediation where abuse occurs
- There needs to be better legal aid support
- Interpretation services, including sign language, are needed
- A national child care plan is necessary to help women seeking child care
- Affordable housing is inadequate
- We need to do more outreach to immigrant and faith group communities
- Cross-sectional solutions—e.g., between social assistance, housing, child care—are needed

2. What aspects of current law or policy are problematic in meeting the needs of women?

Wife abuse:

- Custody issues: sharing custody is difficult; when children are left in the home, the wife won't leave
- Child care while dealing with legal, economic, and employment matters
- Enforcement of restraining orders
- Victims are treated as witnesses and often have no legal representation, though the offender does

Sexual assault:

- Sexual harassment is not recognized as a crime
- Safety audits are available, but not mandatory for public spaces
- The burden of proof is difficult

3. Are there examples (specific cases without names) that illustrate your concerns?

4. What are the most useful and significant changes that have occurred?

- The Victim Witness Assistance Program provides long term support
- Mandatory charging has overall been beneficial, though it is problematic for women who cannot stop the process if they wish to
- Priority housing for abuse victims
- Victim notification when the offender is out on bail
- Communication is opening up between Children's Aid society and violence against women workers
- Provincial commitment to violence against women agencies
- A network of sexual assault counseling services and crisis centres
- A handbook produced by the Ontario Coalition of Sexual Assault Crisis Centres
- There has been improvement in emergency room services, where documentation is taken

5. What, if any, changes have been detrimental?

- Freezes and reductions in funding
- It is still almost impossible for victims to get financial support
- Counter-charging with abuse as a result of mandatory charging policy
- The VWAP puts all services under the legal system – a certain perspective/bias
- The CAS is mandated to remove children from the home where sexual abuse is reported – means that women may lose their children if they report

6. What issues still persist despite years of working in the area?

- Fear of disclosure: related to a wish to protect children, economics, and fear of retaliation
- Many women are still unaware of resources and help available
- Difficulty accessing legal and financial support
- Only sensational cases are publicized—otherwise, the issue remains largely invisible
- Persistence of “anger management” models, treating abuse as conflict-based rather than as coercion-based, and the “family violence” model
- Violence normalized in the media, including the sexualization of women and children in the media
- The violence continues! There is a lack of political will to end it

7. What problems exist for women in accessing and receiving help or services from various agencies?

- Funding cutbacks
- Transportation and child care
- Victim blaming, and the stigma attached to the victim
- Confidentiality, especially in rural areas
- Language barriers
- Lack of community education

8. Are there other important issues that have not been addressed that you would like to mention?

- Dating and teen violence

9. What can groups like CFUW do?

- Support local agencies—*listen!*
- Education—especially young, immigrant, and other marginalized women
- Lobby around all the issues mentioned above
- Share the findings of our study!