

# Violence Against Women and Girls in Lunenburg County

## **Introduction & Context**

This report was commissioned by the Second Story Women's Centre (SSWC) in Lunenburg as a result of its ongoing concern about, and commitment to addressing, issues affecting the women of Lunenburg County.

In 2009, the SSWC's Social Action Committee (SAC) chose Violence Against Women (VAW)<sup>1</sup> as the focus of its present and future work. As a first step in addressing VAW within Lunenburg County the SAC identified the need for an awareness and education campaign. Recognizing the value of a coordinated community response<sup>2</sup>, the SSWC solicited the support of approximately 20 community partners, including, for example, the RCMP, Harbour House transition house, the South Shore Regional School Board, and the South Shore Public Library.

Following an initial meeting held by the SAC with its community partners, it was determined that more information was needed on the extent and contributing factors of VAW at the county level. Subsequently, a researcher was hired on a 100-hour contract to prepare a 'backgrounder' report that would provide the information needed by the SAC/SSWC to begin work on its awareness and education campaign, as well as other future projects. The researcher was also asked to make recommendations about possible next steps and/or areas of focus.<sup>3</sup>

## **Researcher**

Rebecca Atkinson is the former project coordinator of the Family Law Information Project for Abused Women (FLIPAW). FLIPAW partners included: the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS), the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia (THANS), the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW), and the Women's Innovative Justice Initiative (WIJI). As project coordinator, Rebecca researched and wrote a 288-page family law guidebook for women leaving abusive relationships. Following her work with FLIPAW, Rebecca worked as researcher for WIJI where she prepared reports and policy recommendations on woman abuse for a range of sectors, including child welfare, police, corrections, public prosecution, family lawyers, and custody and access assessors. Rebecca has a BA (Hons) in Gender and Women's Studies (UK) and a Master of Journalism degree with academic specializations in Women's Studies and Social Policy (UBC). She was trained as a researcher at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where she worked as a documentary film researcher. She has also completed *Evaluation of Programs, Policies and Processes for Government and Not for Profit Organizations* (Chaytor Consulting).

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<sup>1</sup> VAW refers to violence across the lifespan and includes violence experienced by young women and girls.

<sup>2</sup> See The Duluth Model: <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/duluthmodelonpublic.php>

<sup>3</sup> Please note: This report is not intended for an external audience. It is a compilation of VAW stats and a preliminary scan of local VAW issues only.

## **Methodology**

Since there is virtually no statistical data about VAW available at the county level<sup>4</sup> quantitative information within this report refers mainly to provincial and national levels with county-level projections.

In the absence of local statistics, the researcher carried out qualitative research by conducting phone and face-to-face interviews with a broad range of key informants, including women who have experienced violence<sup>5</sup>. The researcher approached service providers from a wide range of service agencies and organizations relevant to the primary forms of VAW addressed in this report, which include: domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against young women, and elder abuse.

Given the limited time frame for the project and the complexity of the subject<sup>6</sup>, this report seeks to identify a range of issues raised by key informants but does not attempt to provide detailed information about the issues. For example, housing is identified as a major contributing factor in women's and girls' vulnerability to violence and the report recommends further research and/or needs assessment to provide more comprehensive information on which to base an action plan.

## **Defining violence against women**

This report looks at a range of the forms of violence experienced by women and girls over the lifespan, including domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against young women (including self-harm and unsafe sexual behaviours), violence against elderly women and their caregivers, and, to some extent, systemic violence.

To encapsulate this range of women's experiences, this report uses the United Nations' broad definition of VAW, which recognizes it as:

“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 in private life. Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This will be discussed further in the 'Facts and Statistics' section below.

<sup>5</sup> See 'Appendix B'

<sup>6</sup> VAW includes a broad range of forms of violence (see 'Defining violence against women' section).

<sup>7</sup> The United Nations' 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, which was signed by Canada.

## **Gender inequality in Canada: the social and legal context of VAW**

### **Women as persons**<sup>8</sup>

Over time, laws and authoritative bodies have legally sanctioned women's inequality. The foundation of Canadian Law is set in the British system of common law, with its basis in the British North America Act (BNA). Historically, under British common law, women's very being and legal existence was suspended upon marriage. Known as the *Unity of Legal Personality*, women were considered as belongings and extensions of their husbands.<sup>9</sup>

Until the *Persons Case* under the BNA of 1867, women were not specifically included as persons. Therefore, a woman's right to vote, participate in government, own property and maintain autonomy were very limited and often prohibited. The rights women did possess were lost upon marriage.

Canadian women were also limited by an 1876 British common law ruling which stated: "*Women are persons in matters of pains and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges.*" Effectively, women could be punished under the law, but had no rights or freedoms under it.

### **Property law**<sup>10</sup>

Prior to 1848 the British common law removed a woman's control of her property or money upon marriage. Her husband could sell or use her assets with or without her consent. Children were also considered as property of the marriage and therefore the property of the husband, who had the right to make all decisions about them. Upon divorce, he had an absolute right to custody.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were given a legal personality that distinguished them from their husbands. A woman was legally independent, separate and distinct. Women were able to own property and maintain money separate from that of their husbands.

### **The process of change**

Under the British North America Act of 1867 any five persons could initiate an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada for Clarification of any part of the BNA Act. On April 24, 1928 five courageous and accomplished women from Alberta set in motion a great era of change in Canadian history.

Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards and Irene Parlby (later known as the 'Famous Five') came together in 1927 and submitted the following question

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<sup>8</sup> *Women as Persons, Property Law and The process of change* sections are adapted from *After She Leaves: A Training and Resource Manual for Volunteers and Staff Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors and their Children during the Family Court Process* (2006) with permission from Luke's Place.

<sup>9</sup> Under the law, men once had the legal right to physically discipline their wives. It wasn't until 1983 that police were directed to lay charges in cases of family violence and that the sexual assault of a woman by her spouse was criminalized.

to the Supreme Court of Canada: “Does the word ‘person’, in Section 24 of the British North America Act of 1867, include female persons?”

The Supreme Court of Canada said that it did not.

In 1929, the Famous Five brought their appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of England, the highest court of appeal in the British Empire. On October 18, 1929 this court ruled that: “Canada was growing and changing and so must its Constitution.” The women won.

Like many battles hard won by Canadian women, the fight for equality under the law did not end there. Doris Anderson, former Chair of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, campaigned from 1979 to 1981 to eventually achieve the inclusion of women’s rights in Section 28<sup>11</sup> of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### Today<sup>12</sup>

In theory, women are now guaranteed equality under the law. However, women and girls continue to experience inequality and vulnerability in many areas of society, both private and public, including the family and the workforce.

Married or living common-law with children, it is still women who do most of the child rearing and housework and who are more likely to stay at home with a sick child or take time away from work to deal with family-related issues such as parent-teacher interviews and medical appointments. It is also women who lose the most time from work to care for extended family members.

According to data gathered in the 2005 General Social Survey, women spend 4.3 hours per day compared to men’s 2.5 on unpaid housework and child care. This at a time when more and more women, especially those with young children are employed outside the home: by 2004, 65 percent of women with children under the age of 3 were working, a figure which is more than double the employment rate for women in this category just 30 years before.

Women miss more time from work because of family responsibilities: in an average week in 2004, 5 percent of women and only 2 percent of men missed work time due to family responsibilities. Overall that year, women missed 10 days of work and men just 1.5 to take care of family responsibilities.

Even without children, women are significantly disadvantaged when they are married or living common-law. They earn less in the paid workforce, meaning they are likely to have fewer savings and less likely to have a pension/RRSP, which leaves them more vulnerable in the event of relationship breakdown.

The inequality and disadvantaging of women in the labour market (women continue to earn just

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<sup>11</sup> S.28 states: “Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.”

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from *CEDAW, Family Law and Women’s Equality* speech (2010) with permission from Pamela Cross.

73 cents for every dollar earned by men), in tandem with the heavy load of unpaid housework and caring for children and other family members, places women in a situation of social and economic inequality compared with their husbands, and increases their dependency.

This economic dependency in turn exacerbates women's vulnerability to the power and control that may be exercised by a spouse after divorce, and their vulnerability to the volatility and violence exhibited by spouses.

Furthermore, women are the primary victims of violence within the family and it is within the family that women and girls are at greatest risk.

According to a 2000 Statistics Canada report women were 5 times more likely than men to have been injured during an assault and to require medical attention, 5 times more likely to fear for their lives, 5 times more likely to have been choked and 3 times more likely to require time off from work because of partner-perpetrated violence or abuse.

Even a cursory glance at the findings of this report indicates that the violence experienced by women and men is neither similar nor equivalent. As well, women are more likely to be victims of stalking and sexual assault, and to experience substantial psychological impacts from whatever forms of violence they experience.

Gendered differences are clearly apparent in cases of homicide. The 2007 General Social Survey reported that perpetrators of spousal homicide or attempted homicide were overwhelmingly male (82 percent compared with 18 percent who were female). These findings are confirmed and elaborated upon in every report of Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

In terms of family violence experienced by young women and girls, Statistics Canada reports that girls under the age of 18 experience higher rates of both physical and sexual assault by a family members than boys. In 2007, the rate of family-perpetrated sexual assault was more than four times higher for girls than for boys and male family members were identified as the accused in 96 percent of family-related sexual assaults and 71 percent of physical assaults against children and youth.

On the other end of the age spectrum, Statistics Canada has found that senior women have higher rates of violent victimization by a family member compared to senior men.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to examine them, it is important to recognize that many other forms of VAW exist, such as: criminal harassment, workplace violence and harassment, prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment, human rights violations based on actual or perceived sexual identity, and human trafficking.

## **VAW facts and statistics: what we can quantify**

### **INTERNATIONALLY**

The United Nations Population Fund (2005) states:

“Gender-based violence is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.”

Amnesty International states:

“Violence against women is rooted in a global culture of discrimination which denies women equal rights with men and which legitimizes the appropriation of women's bodies for individual gratification or political ends. Every year, violence in the home and the community devastates the lives of millions of women.”<sup>13</sup>

Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic<sup>14</sup>:

- In Canada a woman or child is sexually assaulted once every minute<sup>15</sup>
- In the US a woman is raped every 6 minutes; a woman is battered every 15 seconds
- In North Africa 6,000 women are genitally mutilated each day
- In China this year more than 15,000 women will be sold into sexual slavery
- In Bangladesh this year 200 women will be horribly disfigured when their spurned husbands or suitors burn them with acid
- In India this year more than 7,000 women will be murdered by their families and in-laws in disputes over dowries
- This year about 5,000 women worldwide will be murdered in ‘honour killings’ by family members
- Across the globe, at least one out of every three women has been beaten, forced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

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<sup>13</sup> *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds: Torture and Ill Treatment of Women*, Amnesty International, 2001

<sup>14</sup> Facts in this section come from: *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds: Torture and Ill Treatment of Women*, Amnesty International, 2001

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Fact sheet: extrapolated from Ontario Women’s Directorate, *Dispelling the Myths about Sexual Assault*. Fact sheet, Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 1998

## CANADA

### **Domestic violence**<sup>16</sup>

#### **Overview:**

- Over half of Canadian women (51 percent) have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.<sup>17</sup> Almost 60 percent of these women were the targets of more than one such incident.<sup>18</sup>
- Seven percent of Canadian women<sup>19</sup> reported being physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner in the past five years<sup>20</sup>
- Twenty-one percent of women who experience violence are assaulted during pregnancy.<sup>21</sup>
- The vast majority of victims (87 percent) of partner assault are women<sup>22</sup>
- One to two women are murdered by a current or former partner each week in Canada<sup>23</sup>
- Spousal violence makes up the single largest category of convictions involving violent offences in non-specialized adult courts in Canada over the five-year period 1997/98 to 2001/02. Over 90 percent of offenders were male.<sup>24</sup>
- Thirty-six percent of female victims of spousal violence and less than 10 percent of victims of sexual assault reported these crimes to the police in 2004.<sup>25</sup>
- Physical and sexual abuse costs Canada over \$4 billion each year (factoring into account social services, criminal justice, lost employment days and health care interventions).<sup>26</sup>
- Violence against women occurs across all ethnic, racial, religious, age, social and economic groups. However, some women are more vulnerable and are more likely to experience violence, for example, women with disabilities, rural women, young women and Aboriginal women.

#### **Women are more likely than men to be victims of the most severe forms of violence**

- Women experience higher rates than men of sexual assault, stalking, serious spousal assaults and spousal homicide.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For information on VAW-related problems with these statistics, which come from Statistics Canada via either police-reported crime stats or the General Social Survey, please see information on General Social Survey, p.18 of this report.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada, *The Violence Against Women Survey*, The Daily, November 18, 1993

<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada, The Daily, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, November 18, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> The figure for Nova Scotia women is higher at eight percent or 21,000 women.

<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004

<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*

<sup>23</sup> Dauvergne, M., (2002), *Homicide in Canada - 2001*, Juristat 22(7), Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women*, Statistical Trends 2006

<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women*, Statistical Trends 2006

<sup>26</sup> L. Greaves, O. Hankivsky, J. Kingston-Riechters, *Selected Estimates of the Costs of Violence Against Women*. (London, Ontario: Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children, 1995)

<sup>27</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women*, Statistical Trends 2006

- In 2004, twice as many women than men were beaten by their partners and four times as many were choked. Twice as many female as male victims of spousal assault reported chronic, ongoing assaults (10 or more).<sup>28</sup>
- Women are three times more likely than men to be physically injured by spousal violence and five times more likely to require medical attention.<sup>29</sup>
- Women are five times more likely to fear for their lives as a result of spousal violence.<sup>30</sup>
- 16 percent of women who had been victimized by a spouse reported that they had been sexually assaulted<sup>31</sup>

## **Violence against women affects children**

- Every year in Canada, up to 360,000 children are exposed to domestic violence.<sup>32</sup>
- In children exposed to violence, consequences can include: emotional trauma, depression, injury and permanent disability, as well as other physical, psychological and behavioural problems that can extend into adolescence and adulthood.<sup>33</sup>
- 58,486 women and 36,840 children sought refuge in one of 473 shelters across Canada between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2004.<sup>34</sup>

## **Risk factors<sup>35</sup>**

- Partners' use of psychological or emotional abuse, and frequent heavy drinking by partners, raise the risk of violence against women in spousal relationships
- Women in common-law relationships and those who are separated report rates of spousal violence and homicide that are disproportionate to their representation in the population
- Stalking by ex-partners raises the risk of ex-partner violence

## **Spousal homicides<sup>36</sup>**

- Women continue to be more likely than men to be victims of spousal homicide. In 2007, almost 4 times as many women were killed by a current or former spouse as men.
- In 41 percent of spousal killings of men in which police had the requisite information, the police determined that the male victim was "the first to use or threaten to use physical force or violence in the incident"<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women*, Statistical Trends 2006

<sup>29</sup> Canadian Crime Statistics 2000 - Catalogue 85-205, Statistics Canada, 2001

<sup>30</sup> Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, 2000

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*

<sup>32</sup> *Behind Closed Doors, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*, Joint report by Unicef, the Body Shop International and the Secretariat for the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children, 2006

<sup>33</sup> Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, 2000

<sup>34</sup> Statistics Canada, *Violence Against Women in Canada By the Numbers*

<sup>35</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*

<sup>36</sup> Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, 2009

<sup>37</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*



- During the most recent decade, between 1998 and 2007, about 41 percent of spousal homicides involved common-law partners and more than one-third involved legally married persons.
- Spousal homicide rates were highest for persons in the 15 to 24 year-old age group.

### **Sexual violence**<sup>38</sup>

#### **Overview:**

- Females and youth are at particular risk of being sexually victimized. Victimization and police-reported data both indicate that in 2007 the rate of sexual victimization for females was about 5 times the rate for males.
- Police-reported data indicate that over half of sexual assault victims in 2007 were children under the age of 18.
- Those accused of sexual assaults were most often male and the victim and accused were, in the majority of cases, known to each other
- About one in ten sexual assaults is reported to police, according to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, with only a small proportion of sexual offences formally documented through law enforcement.
- According to the 2004 GSS, there were about 512,000 incidents of sexual assault, representing a rate of 1,977 incidents per 100,000 population aged 15 and older. Given that most sexual assaults go unreported, police-reported sexual assault counts are notably lower, with about 24,200 sexual offences recorded by police in 2007.
- Victimization data suggest that the rates of sexual assault remained stable in recent years. However, police-reported data reveal a steady decline in offences coming to the attention of law enforcement for more than a decade.
- The 2004 GSS showed that sexual victimization rates were dramatically (18 times) higher among those aged 15 to 24, compared to those 55 and over.
- When asked why they did not tell the police about the sexual assault, a majority of victims (58 percent) said that they did not report the incident because it was not important enough. While few sexual assault victims filed formal reports with police, most (72 percent) confided in friends and many turned to family (41 percent) and other informal sources of support.

#### **Females and young people experience higher rates of sexual assault**

- Both police and victimization data indicate that rates of sexual victimization are higher among females, regardless of the type of sexual assault experienced. The 2004 GSS shows that sexual victimization rates for females were almost 5 times the rate for males (3,248 incidents per 100,000 versus 664 incidents per 100,000). Similarly, police reported data for 2007 indicate that female rates of sexual victimization were 5.6 times higher than male rates (120 versus 21 per 100,000 population).
- Specifically, in 2007, the female victimization rates for levels 1 and 2 sexual assault were each about 6 times higher than the rates for males. In comparison, aggravated sexual

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<sup>38</sup> Statistics Canada, *Sexual Assault in Canada: 2004 and 2007, 2008*

assault (level 3) rates were 4 times greater for women versus men (0.64 versus 0.15 per 100,000 population).

- Police-reported data, which captures information on victims of every age, illustrate that in 2007, over half (58 percent) of sexual assault victims were under the age of 18, with children under 12 accounting for 25 percent. The vast majority of these young victims were female (81 percent).
- Being young, attending school and frequent participation in evening activities are all factors that have been identified as increasing the risk of violent victimization.

### **Accused most likely to be male, young, and known to victims**

- While females are disproportionately the victims of sexual offences, males are disproportionately the accused. According to 2007 police-reported data, 97 percent of persons accused of sexual offences were male.
- Rates of sexual offending were highest among persons aged 12 to 17 (90 per 100,000 population), followed by 18 to 34 year olds (55 per 100,000 population) and 35 to 44 year olds (42 per 100,000 population).
- Both police-reported and victimization surveys suggest that sexual assault incidents are most likely to occur when a victim and offender are known to each other. Over half (55 percent) of the sexual assaults reported to the GSS in 2004 involved an offender who was a friend or acquaintance of the victim, with stranger assaults accounting for 35 percent of incidents. In the case of police-reported data, the relationship between the victim and accused was unknown in 19 percent of cases. However in cases where the relationship could be determined, police-reported data for 2007 show that the victim and accused were known to each other in 82 percent of sexual assault incidents, and in approximately 18 percent of incidents, the accused was a stranger to the victim.
- Police-reported data, which include victims of every age, indicate that the accused was a family member in nearly a third (31 percent) of sexual offence incidents that came to the attention of law enforcement in 2007, with extended family members (10 percent), the victim's parents (10 percent), or some other immediate family member (7 percent) identified as the accused most frequently. Less often, relatives accused in sexual assaults were current or former spouses (4 percent).
- Similar to the proportion of sexual offences where the accused was a relative, 28 percent of police-reported sexual assaults involved offenders who were casual acquaintances of the victim. To a lesser extent, offenders were identified as friends (8 percent), authority figures (6 percent), current or former boyfriends/girlfriends (5 percent), or business acquaintances (4 percent) of the victims.
- *The discrepancy between the two sources above (GSS and police-reported data) in relation to the information each provides on incidents involving family members, may be explained, in part, by the GSS sample. The GSS surveys individuals aged 15 and older, whereas police-reported data cover victims of all ages, including young children. By excluding children from its sample, the GSS cannot provide information on child victims. Research has shown that children are most likely to be victimized by family members. Thus, the low number of incidents where the victim and accused were related may be a reflection of this exclusion. In addition, it is also important to note that the GSS data on sexual assaults exclude incidents involving spouses.*

### **More serious sexual offences most likely to occur in private residences**

- According to the 2004 GSS, more than half (51 percent) of sexual assault incidents occurred in a commercial or institutional establishment followed by a residence or surrounding location (31 percent), a street or other public place (12 percent), or in another location (6 percent).
- The location of the incident varied with the specific offence type. More than half (56 percent) of sexual attacks occurred in and around a residence; whereas, over half (57 percent) of incidents of unwanted sexual touching occurred in a commercial establishment. Police-reported data indicate that 68 percent of aggravated sexual assaults occurred in or around a residence, compared to 65 percent of the less serious offence, level 1 sexual assault.

### **Violence against girls<sup>39</sup>**

- According to Statistics Canada, in 2007 the rate of police-reported physical and sexual assault against children and youth was 833 per 100,000 population, or .83 percent.
- The rate of physical and sexual violence for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 is nearly twice this total rate and four times higher than for children under the age of 12.
- In 2007, the sexual assault rate for children and youth was over five times higher than it was for adults. The rate of physical assault in adolescents aged 12 to 17 was nearly double that of adults.
- In more than 8 out of 10 reported cases, children and youth are assaulted by someone they know, most often by a friend or acquaintance (55 percent) or by a family member (30 percent). In 15 percent of incidents the perpetrator was a stranger.
- Overall, in 2007, police-reported rates of physical assault by family members were somewhat higher for girls (149 per 100,000 population) than for boys (133 per 100,000 population).
- Rates of family-related physical assault were higher among older youth, particularly for 12 to 17 year-olds. Among boys, the rate of physical assault by a family member peaked around the age of 14 (200 incidents per 100,000 population).
- By comparison, the rate for girls was highest among 17 year-olds (364 per 100,000)—the highest rate of family-related physical assault for all children and youth, regardless of sex.
- The rate of family-related sexual assault against children and youth was more than four times higher for girls (107 per 100,000 population) than for boys (25 per 100,000 population).
- Young adolescent girls, particularly those between the ages of 12 and 15, were at greatest risk of sexual assault by a relative. Similar to previous years, the family-perpetrated sexual assault rate for boys was considerably lower than the rate for girls, regardless of age.

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<sup>39</sup> The information in this section comes from two sources: Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, 2009 and Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*.

- In 2007, as in previous years, male family members were identified as the accused in the majority of family-related sexual (96 percent) and physical assaults (71 percent) against children and youth under 18.
- Among incidents of family-related sexual assaults 36 percent of children were victimized by a male extended family member, 32 percent by a father, and 27 percent by a brother. Fathers were involved in 44 percent of family-related physical assaults against children and youth, followed by brothers (13 percent) and male extended family members (10 percent).
- Being young and female are risk factors for sexual assault. 86 percent of victims of sexual offences reported to the police in 2004 were female.
- However, the percentage of sexual offences involving male victims is higher for younger victims. In incidents involving the most vulnerable age group, children under 12 years of age, 30 percent of victims were male. Fewer teenage and adult victims were male.
- In 2004, youth under 18 represented 22 percent of the Canadian population but made up 58 percent of victims of sexual offences. 81 percent of young victims are female.

### **Violence against senior women** <sup>40</sup>

#### **Police-reported family violence against older adults**

- Senior women had higher rates of violent victimization by a family member (52 per 100,000) compared to senior men (43 per 100,000). However, senior men (163 per 100,000) had a higher overall rate of violent victimization compared to senior women (114 per 100,000).
- Spouses and adult children were the most common perpetrators of family violence against senior women, while adult children were most often the accused in family violence against senior men.
- In 2007, 1,938 incidents of family violence against seniors were reported to police, representing more than one-third of all violent incidents committed against older adults.
- The rate of family violence for seniors (48 per 100,000) was much lower than for those in younger age groups. Compared to seniors, the family violence rate was twice as high for adults aged 55 to 64 (104 per 100,000) and was more than 8 times higher among adults aged 25 to 34 (406 per 100,000).
- Seven percent of seniors have experienced emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, caregiver or spouse in the past five years.<sup>41</sup>
- Just over half of police-reported family violence incidents against seniors were common assaults.
- Half of police-reported incidents of family violence against seniors did not result in physical injury. When physical injuries were sustained, the vast majority (91 percent) were minor.

<sup>40</sup> Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, 2009. For a more detailed discussion of violence against seniors, see the *Fact Sheet – Police-reported violence against older adults* contained in the 2009 Statistical Profile: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2009000-eng.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada, 1999

## Family homicides against older adults

- Senior female victims killed by a family member were most commonly killed by their spouse (40 percent) or adult son (36 percent). In nearly two-thirds of family homicides of senior men, an adult son was the accused killer.
- The overall homicide rate was lower among adults aged 65 years and older (9 per million population) compared to persons under 65 years of age (23 per million population). However, rates of family-perpetrated homicide for seniors (3.8 per million population) and non-seniors (4.5 per million population) were comparable.
- Most often, frustration, anger or despair was the apparent motive for family-perpetrated homicides against seniors. In contrast, financial gain was the most commonly identified reason behind senior homicides committed by non-family members.

## NOVA SCOTIA

### Domestic Violence<sup>42</sup>

#### Overview:

- Between 1993 and 1999, the proportion of Nova Scotia women who reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of their current or former spouse/intimate partner within the previous five years declined from 13 percent to 8 percent. From 1999 to 2004, this percentage remained unchanged – meaning an estimated 21,000 Nova Scotian women were victims of intimate partner violence between 1999 and 2004.
- Compared to men, women are more likely to report experiencing the most serious forms of intimate partner violence, such as being beaten, choked, or threatened with or having a gun or knife used against them.
- Female victims of spousal violence are also much more likely to report being injured, suffer lost productivity, experience multiple assaults, fear for their lives, and experience negative emotional consequences as a result of the intimate partner violence they experience. Male victims were much more likely (30 percent versus 6 percent) to report that the violence had not affected them.

#### Who is at highest risk?<sup>43</sup>

- Women who are in common-law relationships are at greater risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, as are women who have been in a relationship for three years or less, and women whose partners are frequent, heavy drinkers.

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<sup>42</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

<sup>43</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

- Aboriginal women in Canada are at least three times more likely to have experienced spousal violence than non-Aboriginal women.
- Spousal violence is more likely to occur where emotional abuse is present.
- 18 percent of Canadian women and 17 percent of men reported experiencing emotional abuse in 2004. Women were more likely to report certain types of emotional abuse – that their partner “put them down and called them names to make them feel bad”, that their partner harmed or threatened to harm someone close to them, or that their partner prevented them from having access to the family income.
- A third of all incidents of spousal violence in Canada (approximately 394,000 cases between 1999 and 2004) were witnessed by children.<sup>44</sup>

### Seeking help<sup>45</sup>

- Nearly three-quarters of spousal violence incidents against women in Nova Scotia are not reported to police. In 2004, only 26 percent of Nova Scotia women who had experienced intimate partner violence reported it to police, one of the lowest rates in Canada. In Canada as a whole, 36 percent of women who experienced intimate partner violence reported it to police.
- A large proportion of victims of intimate partner violence (83 percent of Canadian women and 60 percent of Canadian men) confide in informal sources of help and support such as family, friend, co-worker, doctor/nurse, or clergy.
- Approximately 47 percent of female victims and 20 percent of male victims of intimate partner violence indicated that they had sought help from formal helping agencies or organizations such as victims’ services, women’s centres, psychologists, etc (data is for Canada as a whole).
- Male victims of intimate partner violence were more likely than female victims (35 percent versus 12 percent), not to mention the violence to anyone (data is for Canada, as a whole).

### What we know about intimate partner violence that is reported to police:<sup>46</sup>

- In 2007, 826 incidents of spousal violence were reported to police in Nova Scotia. The rate per 100,000 population for women in Nova Scotia was 221 while for men it was 64.
- About 8 in 10 victims of spousal violence are female.
- Close to three-quarters of victims are aged 25 to 44.
- Just over two-thirds of reported incidents of spousal violence in 2006 were common assaults.
- There are differences in types of offences reported depending on sex of victim (male victims are more likely to report major assaults)<sup>47</sup> and marital status (ex-spouses/partners

<sup>44</sup> It is important to recognize that children may be harmed by domestic violence even when they do not directly witness an assault. E.g., they may be impacted by the deleterious impact of abuse on their mother, by negative parenting practices of a father who is a domestic violence perpetrator, or by social isolation imposed on the mother by the father. See: *Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as they Grow*, Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System, 2007

<sup>45</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

<sup>46</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

were much more likely to report stalking (criminal harassment) and uttering threats compared to current spouses/partners).

### **Homicide / Spousal Homicide<sup>48</sup>**

Between 1991 and 2008, there were a total of 292 homicides in Nova Scotia. Of these, women and girls comprised close to one-third (31 percent) of victims, overall (i.e., 91 females and 201 males).

- Between 1991 and 2007, more than half (57.9 percent) of female victims of homicide in Nova Scotia were killed by their spouses or intimate partners, compared to 9.3 percent of male victims.
- Women in Nova Scotia are about 45 times more likely to be killed by a spouse or intimate partner than they are by a stranger (57.9 percent versus 1.3 percent).
- In Nova Scotia, a total of 91 women were victims of homicide between 1991 and 2008

### **Spousal Homicide<sup>49</sup>**

Between 1975 and 2008 there were 90 spousal homicides in Nova Scotia. In 66 of these cases (73 percent) the victims were women and the remaining 24 victims were men.<sup>50</sup>

As is the case with homicide in general, rates of spousal homicide in Canada have been declining over the last 30 years, for both women and men. Over this period, however, women have consistently been more likely than men to be victims of spousal homicide. The rate of spousal homicide against women has been three to five times higher than the rate for male victims. Rates of spousal homicide are higher for those in common-law relationships and for young adults, particularly young women.

Rates of spousal homicides are also much higher among Aboriginal persons. While we do not have information for Nova Scotia, we know that the spousal homicide rate is eight times greater for Aboriginal women in Canada than it is for non-Aboriginal women. For Aboriginal men in Canada, the spousal homicide rate is 38 times greater than it is for non-Aboriginal men.

### **Sexual Assault in Nova Scotia<sup>51</sup>**

#### **Overview:**

- Halifax has the third highest rate of sexual assault in Canada.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This fact does not explore to what extent women perpetrated major assaults in self-defense. It is worth noting that in 41 percent of spousal killings of men in which police had the requisite information, the police determined that the male victim was “the first to use or threaten to use physical force or violence in the incident.”

<sup>48</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

<sup>49</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009

<sup>50</sup> Again, this research does not examine the number of men killed by women in self-defense, nor does it examine which partner, if either, was the dominant aggressor within the relationship.

<sup>51</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Sexual Assault*, 2009 except points 1-3

- In Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) there is on average a sexual assault reported everyday.<sup>53</sup>
- 31,000 Nova Scotians indicated that they were victims of sexual assault in 2004 – a rate of 40 per 1,000 population aged 15 and over.
- Between 1999 and 2004, the sexual assault rate increased in only two provinces in Canada: Nova Scotia and Manitoba.
- Eighty-four percent of Canadians who reported being sexually assaulted in the 12 months prior to the survey were women; 16 percent were men.
- Ninety-one percent of those accused of sexual assault were male.
- The largest proportion of victims of sexual assault are young: 44 per cent of victims are under 25 years old.
- In Canada, 88 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to police. Compared to other violent victimization, sexual assault survivors are much less likely to report the crime.

#### **What we know about police-reported sexual assault:<sup>54</sup>**

- In 2007, 765 sexual offences were reported to police in Nova Scotia. These comprised 7.7 percent of all violent offences reported to police in the province.
- Nova Scotia's rate of police-reported sexual assaults in 2007 was 75 per 100,000 population. The rate for Canada was 65 per 100,000 population.
- In 65 percent of cases reported to Halifax Regional Police in 2007, victims of sexual offences knew the accused; in 28 percent they did not.
- In 2007, 30 percent of reported sexual assaults in Nova Scotia resulted in the laying of a charge against the accused, down from 56 percent in 1993.
- In comparison, the proportion of other violent offences that resulted in the laying of a charge remained relatively stable during this period, averaging 43 percent.
- In 2007, the proportion of sexual assaults that resulted in the laying of a charge was lower in Nova Scotia than in all other provinces and territories in Canada.
- Conviction rates for sexual assault have typically been lower than conviction rates for other violent offences over the last number of years. However, in 2006/07, the conviction rate for sexual assaults in Nova Scotia was almost identical (49 versus 50 percent) to the one for other violent offences.
- Acquittal rates for sexual assaults in Nova Scotia have consistently been higher than acquittal rates for other violent offences. In 2006/07, the acquittal rate for sexual assaults was 13 percent while for other violent offences it was 6 percent.

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<sup>52</sup> 'The Most Dangerous Cities in Canada: Sexual Assault', 2009 MacLean's National Crime Rankings, MacLean's Magazine, 2009

<sup>53</sup> Avalon Sexual Assault Centre fact sheet, from Halifax Regional Police 2006

<sup>54</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Sexual Assault*, 2009



## **Sexual Violence and Diverse Populations<sup>55</sup>**

There is little information available about rates of sexual violence in particular populations of women such as Aboriginal, Immigrant, lesbians and women with disabilities. The 2004 GSS indicates that rates of overall violent victimization are significantly higher among the Aboriginal population (319 versus 101 people per 1,000 population) and that Aboriginal women, in particular, are at high risk of victimization with rates that are three and a half times higher than that of non-Aboriginal women.

### **Violence against girls in Nova Scotia**

Research on violence against girls and young women in Nova Scotia is limited.<sup>56</sup> One study found that 43 percent of Canadian women had experienced at least one incident of unwanted sexual touching, forced or attempted forced sexual intercourse, or being forced to perform other acts of a sexual nature *before the age of 16*. In Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW) conducted research with young women in this province and found that of those involved in dating relationships, 11 percent had experienced sexual abuse, 18 percent had experienced physical abuse, and 32 percent had experienced emotional abuse. NSACSW also found that 19 percent of young women who had had sex with a male had been forced to have sex by their boyfriends.<sup>57</sup>

## **LUNENBURG COUNTY**

### **Domestic Violence<sup>58</sup>**

#### **Harbour House Transition House**

For 2009/2010 fiscal year:

Counseling Sessions: 923

Distress Calls: 372

New Admissions: 86

Children (with their mothers): 35

Readmissions: 13

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<sup>55</sup> Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Sexual Assault*, 2009

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Nova Scotia Department of Justice, Policy and Planning, March 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Day, Diane. (1990). *Young Women in Nova Scotia: A Study of Attitudes, Behaviour, and Aspirations*. Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

<sup>58</sup> Projections about domestic violence in Lunenburg County are approximations based on transition house estimates, provincial victimization rates and county demographic information.

Harbour House serves Lunenburg and Queens Counties but does, occasionally, also house women from elsewhere in Nova Scotia. According to the Executive Director of Harbour House, approximately 75 percent of the total number of women served is from Lunenburg County. Therefore, it is estimated that of the total number of women admitted as residents (86), approximately 65 were from Lunenburg County. Although it not possible to gauge what percent of abused women make distress calls to the transition house<sup>59</sup>, it is possible to estimate that approximately 279 of the total 372 distress calls made last year came from women in Lunenburg County.

Harbour House estimates that the total number of residents represents *at most* 50 percent of its total number of clients, and, as previously mentioned, it is estimated that transition houses serve approximately ten percent<sup>60</sup> of the total population of abused women<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, we can conservatively estimate that the total number of abused women (i.e., women experiencing spousal abuse) in Lunenburg County over the 2009/2010 fiscal year was approximately 1300.

This figure represents six percent of the total population of women aged 15 and over (20,890) in Lunenburg County according to the 2006 Census. The GSS puts the number of Nova Scotia women who have experienced spousal assault at eight percent in the past five years. The fact that the number here is higher, that is, six percent in the past year, could be explained by the fact that the GSS measures only physical and sexual assault rates, and not other forms of abuse<sup>62</sup>. It is worth noting that women who have experienced both physical and emotional forms of domestic violence often describe emotional abuse as the more devastating, both to themselves and to their children.

The 2004 GSS found that eight percent of Nova Scotia women aged 15 and over had experienced physical or sexual assault by an intimate partner in the past five years. This means that approximately 1,671 women in Lunenburg County were victims of intimate partner assault over a five-year period. Again, this figure does not capture abusive spousal relationships that do not feature physical or sexual assault.

### **Provincial Victim Services**

At the county level, Victim Services is unable to break down its files by gender, age, offence type, or relationship between victim and suspect/offender.<sup>63</sup> Nor does Victim Services break down 'Family Violence' files to distinguish between, for example, domestic violence and elder abuse. 'Family Violence' refers to any offence occurring within a family relationship, although

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<sup>59</sup> According to the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence*, 2009, only approximately 47 percent of female victims of intimate partner violence indicated that they had sought help from formal helping agencies or organizations such as transition houses, victims' services, women's centres. The number of women who have made distress calls to transition houses would be lower than the 47 percent because that figure reflects a range of formal agencies, not only transition houses. However, the current database system used by the transition house does not track how many times an individual woman uses a service; therefore some women may have made more than one, or even multiple, distress calls.

<sup>60</sup> This refers to the total number of both residential and outreach clients.

<sup>61</sup> Personal communication with Executive Director, Harbour House, April 2010.

<sup>62</sup> It does look at some forms of psychological abuse, but only where they coincide with physical or sexual assault.

<sup>63</sup> It is possible to obtain this detailed information within two months by making an audit request to Tracy Hannah, Manager, Provincial Victim Services Program.

the Manager of Provincial Services did indicate that a ‘high percentage’ of files are domestic violence. Also, Victim Services do not track the number of files they handle compared with the total number of cases within the criminal justice system; therefore it is not possible to gauge what percentage of victims actually uses Victim Services.

In Lunenburg County<sup>64</sup>, there are currently 113 open files, comprised of 92 Adults and 21 Children.

Of these 113 open files:

High Risk for Lethality, Domestic Violence: 18

Family violence: 78

Sexual assaults: 11

High Risk for Lethality

It is important to note that there are currently 18 domestic violence files currently designated as ‘High Risk for Lethality’ in this County. This means that these cases may result in murder and/or suicide.<sup>65</sup>

‘Family Violence’

Because Victim Services cannot break down ‘Family Violence’ files by gender, relationship of victim and offender or even types of offence, it is not possible to estimate VAW figures from the information provided.

Sexual Assault

Due to the lack of detailed information about the Victim Services sexual assault files and previously unreliable predictions made about the number of victims of sexual assault who use Victim Services<sup>66</sup> it not possible to make VAW projections based on the 11 open files.

**Sexual Violence<sup>67</sup>**

The most straightforward means of gauging the level of sexual assault in Lunenburg County is to make a projection by comparing provincial data with county demographic information based on the 2006 Census. According to the 2004 GSS, 31,000 Nova Scotians indicated that they were victims of sexual assault, which is a rate of 40 per 1,000 population aged 15 and over, or four percent of the total population of the province. The total population of Lunenburg County aged 15 and over is approximately 40, 590, four percent of which is 1624. Because women represent

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<sup>64</sup> On April 13, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> For info, see Justice Canada website: [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2009/rr09\\_7/p4.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2009/rr09_7/p4.html)

<sup>66</sup> According to Statistic Canada’s Victim Services Survey, 2002/2003 only 11 percent of Nova Scotia victims of sexual assault and 55 percent of victims of spousal assault who are involved with the criminal justice system make use of Victim Services. It should be noted, however, that a large proportion of Nova Scotia agencies did not provide counts of clients served on the snapshot data collection day; therefore the Victim Services Survey figures undercount the actual number of victims served by Nova Scotia Victim Services.

<sup>67</sup> Projections about sexual assault rates in Lunenburg County are approximations based on provincial sexual assault rates and county demographic information.

84 percent of victims of sexual assault, it is estimated that about 1364 women in Lunenburg County are sexually assaulted each year – although fewer than 1 in 10 are likely to report to police.

\* Please note: This figure does not take into account the number of sexual assaults against children under age 15, which is likely to be a significant given that youth under the age of 18 represent 58 percent of victims of all sexual assaults.<sup>68</sup>

### **Violence against girls**

It is not possible to gauge the rate of violence against girls in Lunenburg County until SSWC accesses provincial and/or police service level data<sup>69</sup>, at which time this section of the report will be updated. For general information on violence against girls, please refer back to the Violence against girls section (Canada) section above. For qualitative research in this area, please see local findings below. As well, see research conducted by other Nova Scotia Women's Centres.<sup>70</sup>

### **Violence against senior women**<sup>71</sup>

Statistics Canada has found that in Canada seven percent of seniors have experienced emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, caregiver or spouse over a five-year period. According to the 2006 Census, there are approximately 7770 seniors in Lunenburg County; therefore approximately 544 local seniors have experienced emotional or financial abuse within a five-year period.

In Canada, the police-reported rate of violent victimization against senior women by a family member is 52 per 100,000 or .05 percent. According to the 2006 Census, there are 4925 senior women living in Lunenburg County; therefore the rate of violence experienced by senior women based on police-reported data is negligible. However, anecdotal data finds that violence against seniors is not that uncommon, which suggests that it is underreported to police. This is consistent with the fact that the Seniors Safety Coordinator with Bridgewater Police/Bridgewater RCMP reports no referrals about violence against seniors in the past year. Yet service providers outside the criminal justice system, for example, mental health workers and religious leaders, do report experience in dealing with violence against the elderly. The rate of police-reported violent

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<sup>68</sup> See Tri-County Women's Centre's final project report: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls: Reducing the Harm/ Reducing the Violence, 2009. With multiple community partners, Tri-County Women's Centre developed a framework to address sexual violence against women and girls, including harm reduction, prevention and intervention components. See also Sexual Violence project (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women) carried out by Pictou County Women's Centre.

<sup>69</sup> A request for this information was made to Statistics Canada during the writing of this report and will be added once it is received.

<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of violence against girls and young women in rural Nova Scotia, see the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) report, *Violence Against Women and Girls: A Rural Response: A Preliminary Report on Participatory Action Research with Girls and Young Women in Guysborough and Antigonish Counties*, 2009. For a sample information guide for young women, see: *The Girl's Guide to Antigonish and Guysborough Counties* (2009), produced by the AWRC. For promising practice recommendations, see the AWRC's brochure: *Promising Practices for Working with Rural Girls on Violence Prevention*.

<sup>71</sup> Projections about senior abuse rates in Lunenburg County are approximations based on national police-reported data and county demographic information.

victimization against senior women by a non-family member is 114 per 100,000 or .11 percent, which puts the number of victims in Lunenburg County at approximately five. But again, this is a projection based on police-reported data and likely undercounts the number of incidents and victims.

### **Law Enforcement: Bridgewater Police Services/ Lunenburg County RCMP**

Police-reported VAW data is not available directly from local police services. RCMP and Municipal Police provide their data to the national RCMP data collection system (PROS), which is used by Statistics Canada. The only way to obtain this information is to make a request to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. (For a more detailed discussion, see below in 'Some problems with numbers' section.)

The SSWC has formally requested information from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Statistics Canada) on cases of VAW in Lunenburg County. If/when this information is provided it will be added to this report.

In addition, it is recommended that the SSWC makes a formal request for an audit from Provincial Victim Services that will provide detailed information about Victim Services files in Lunenburg County, e.g. gender of victim and suspect, type of offence, relationship between victim and suspect, etc. If obtained, that information could be added to this report.

### **Measuring VAW: Some problems with numbers**

The SAC requested statistical data on VAW in Lunenburg County. There were a number of obstacles in obtaining accurate county-based data. For example:

- Just over one third (36 percent) of spousal assaults and only eight percent of sexual assaults are reported to the police; therefore the number of police-reported incidents does not reflect the level of VAW in a community.<sup>72</sup>
- A woman is assaulted by her spouse an average of 35 times<sup>73</sup> before she contacts the police; therefore police data does not give an accurate picture of the level of violence individual women have experienced.
- Transition Houses serve only an estimated 10 percent<sup>74</sup> of women in abusive relationships.

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<sup>72</sup> Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*

<sup>73</sup> Response of the Criminal Justice System to Wife Abuse, Research Contract 79445, Solicitor General of Canada, Peter Jaffe and C.S. Burns, 1981.

<sup>74</sup> Personal communication with Executive Directors of Harbour House and Chrysalis House transition houses, April 2010.

- The current system of data collection used by Transition Houses is outdated and does not accurately reflect the number of women served or the range of services provided<sup>75</sup>. Nova Scotia Transition Houses are in the process of moving to a more consistent and accurate means of collecting data.
- Except when it is preparing a Domestic Violence Tracking Project (Phase Four is now underway) the Nova Scotia Department of Justice does not track incidents of domestic violence or any other forms of VAW<sup>76</sup>.
- Police-reported data we have access to at the county level (that is, at the police-service level) provide only the types and numbers of offences reported to police in a given year. They do not give any information about the victim (e.g., sex) or about the victim-suspect relationship. This detailed information (which appears on 'Occurrence' reports) is registered on the RCMP data collection system (PROS), which is sent to Statistics Canada. Although local police services record the information using sub-codes (e.g. number of domestic violence files, number of child victims of sexual assault, etc.), they have no way of extrapolating it other than manually. Therefore, at the local level we can request the number of assaults, but not the number of domestic assaults or we can request the number of sexual assaults, but not the number of sexual assaults against women and girls. For detailed information we have to make a request to Statistics Canada, which we have done.
- Victim Services data does not compare the number of incidents/criminal justice system files with the number of clients, nor does it collect information on the source of the referral. Therefore it is not possible to estimate the number of VAW cases based on Victim Services data.
- There are significant problems with the General Social Survey, which provides the basis of Statistics Canada's most current VAW statistics, which also provide the basis of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council's Fact Sheets on Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault. According to Pamela Cross<sup>77</sup>, a feminist lawyer, former Executive Director of the National Association of Women and the Law, and currently a legal consultant and trainer with a number of Ontario VAW organizations, the reporting of the General Social Survey (GSS) is significantly flawed. Ms. Cross makes the following points<sup>78</sup>:
  - The tool used did not address the issue of coercive control but rather just counted individual incidences of physical behaviour by one spouse towards the other.

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<sup>75</sup> Personal communication with Executive Directors of Harbour House and Chrysalis House transition houses, April 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Personal communication with researcher in Nova Scotia Department of Justice, April 2010.

<sup>77</sup> See Pamela Cross's bio at: <http://users.xplornet.com/~pamelacross/pccresume.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication with Pamela Cross, April 2010.

- There is no analysis of the primary or dominant aggressor over time in the relationships.
  - Only limited behavioural options were presented in the survey (e.g., rape was not presented)
  - By counting only numbers of incidents, the survey failed to look at whether those incidents were offensive or defensive or to distinguish levels of severity.
  - The survey interviewed only one person in each couple.
  - No questions were asked about the cumulative impact of the behaviours.
  - Due to the flaws in the research, false conclusions were reached, most significantly, perhaps, is the gender neutralization of VAW. The media picked up on the false conclusions and continues to present domestic violence as gender neutral.<sup>79</sup>
- Abuse of senior women often involves issues such as emotional abuse, an adult child moving into the home unwanted, theft of belongings or exploitation of power of attorney. If the victim confides in someone about the abuse, she may be more likely to disclose to a church leader, for example, than to the police. This makes elder abuse difficult to track.
  - Girls may not be clear about what constitutes sexual assault or whether they have given consent to a sexual act. They may also believe they are responsible if they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or feel too ashamed to disclose the abuse. These factors make it difficult to accurately gauge the level of sexual violence against young women.
  - Sexual and family violence most often occurs ‘behind closed doors’ and is therefore very difficult to measure. Furthermore, women’s sense of shame, isolation and fear may prevent them from disclosing abuse.
  - Many abusive behaviours, such as emotional or psychological abuse and isolation, are not considered criminal offences under Canada’s Criminal Code and are therefore not subject to any tracking system.

## **Final Word**

To engage in a dialogue with those who are skeptical or unknowledgeable about the gendered reality of domestic violence or the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls, it is important that SSWC staff and SAC members have a clear understanding of the use of coercive

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<sup>79</sup> For an excellent and essential discussion of coercive control and differences between male and female patterned violence within intimate partner relationships, see: Neilson, L. (2004) “Assessing Mutual Partner-Abuse Claims in Child Custody and Access Cases” [\*Family Court Review\*](#) 42 (3) 411-438.

control in intimate relationships and the differences between male and female patterned violence. For example, women's use of violence as self-defense within the context of abusive relationships or the fact that senior women are less likely to experience violence than senior men, but more likely to be assaulted by a family member. It is also important to recognize that men and boys are also often victims of violence (including sexual violence), and that the perpetrators of the violence and abuse they experience are predominantly male. Acknowledging the very real risks faced by men and boys, and recognizing the implications of masculinization<sup>80</sup> within our culture, will help us to understand the complexity of gendered violence and add to our credibility as we continue to work to address VAW.

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<sup>80</sup> As one key informant stated: "If we have unhealthy young men, we have unsafe young women."



## **Appendix ‘A’**

The following is a list of the service organizations, agencies and programs contacted during preparation of this report. In some cases more than one member of the same organization was interviewed. In total, the researcher interviewed 30 service providers and four women.<sup>81</sup> Please note that issues identified by local service providers and individual women in Lunenburg County, as well as recommendations, are contained in the full report, accessible by making a request at [info@secstory.com](mailto:info@secstory.com)

### **Law Enforcement / Corrections**

#### **Correction Services**

Bridgewater Police

RCMP, Lunenburg County

### **Public Health**

Healthy Beginnings Program, Public Health

Parenting Journey Program, Public Health

Adult Mental Health

Adolescent Team, Mental Health

Community Development, Public Health

Addictions Services, Mental Health, Bridgewater

### **Housing**

Policy and Planning Department, Town of Bridgewater

South Shore Housing Authority, Bridgewater

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<sup>81</sup> The researcher was unable to make contact with those key informants that appear in bold type. They were either unavailable or there was insufficient time.

Legal Aid / Courts

**Nova Scotia Legal Aid, Bridgewater**

Women's Services

Harbour House, Transition House, Bridgewater

Second Story Women's Centre, Lunenburg

Men's Intervention

**Men's Intervention Program**

Family Resource Centres

Bridgewater Family Resource Centre, Bridgewater

Child Welfare

Child Welfare, Dept of Community Services

Income Assistance / Child Maintenance

**Income Assistance, Department of Community Services, Bridgewater**

**Child Maintenance, Department of Community Services, Bridgewater**

Victim Services / HRL Protocol

Victim Services, Bridgewater RCMP and Bridgewater Police

Victim Services, Halifax

Provincial Victim Services, Kentville Office

Sexual Health

Sexual Health Centre, Lunenburg County

Youth

Empire House, Bridgewater

South Shore Schools Plus / PDR

Guidance Counselor, New Germany High School

Guidance Counselor, Bayview Community School

**Youth Outreach Worker, Dept of Community Services**

### Seniors

**Seniors Health Team, Fisherman's Memorial Hospital, Lunenburg**

Seniors Safety Coordinator, RCMP/Bridgewater Police Victims Services

Lutheran Church, Bridgewater

Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Bridgewater

### First Nations

**First Nations Parenting Journey, Liverpool**

Acadian First Nations Health Centre (Income Assistance, Youth, Community Health)

### Women

Four women were interviewed in one-to-one interviews and one focus group.