



The Salvation Army Submission to the
House of Commons Status of Women
Committee Study:
System of Shelters and Transition Houses
Serving Women and Children Affected by
Violence Against Women and Intimate
Partner Violence

The Salvation Army Canada welcomes the opportunity to participate in the committee's study on services for women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence.

Salvation Army Services

The Salvation Army is Canada's largest non-governmental provider of social services and programs for the most marginalised and socially excluded individuals.

Throughout The Salvation Army's work in Canada our social services have assisted thousands women and children impacted by family and intimate partner violence. In addition, many of the women who we serve at through our other programs – shelters, life skills, corrections, seniors care, community and family services practical assistance, have also experienced (or are experiencing) violence. Finally, we've walked alongside over 1,500 women and girls who have experienced some of the most extreme and egregious forms of domestic/intimate partner violence were assisted through our anti-human trafficking and exploitation programs and direct services since 2009.

This submission is informed by The Salvation Army's collective experience, knowledge and expertise about the issues, impacts and possible options regarding the responses to and prevention of violence against women and intimate partner violence in Canada.

Current Needs and Gaps

- Women and/or families fleeing violence are often forced to rely on the emergency shelter system due to a lack of space in specialized programs. This is especially true in Northern, Interior, and Indigenous communities. Although the shelters provide meals and accommodation, they are not designed for the specific needs of the women and children. These shelters are not always able to provide the necessary safety systems, support and programs.
- While the women who are able to access violence against women shelters may be safe while residing there, once they leave, there is no guarantee that they will not return to or experience a new violence. Women, and especially those with children, often experience economic challenges – which often leads to women returning to unsafe situations.
- We see that marginalized women experience higher rates of violence, and often have less resources to access support, including transportation and legal advocacy.
- We are witnessing increased rates of mental illness impacts and/or substance use as a means to cope with violence, which causes additional barriers.
- In both domestic violence and exploitation, we know that it can take repeated attempts (up to 10) to leave abusive circumstances, especially when there are no other viable options or the abuser is a core relationship. Additionally, the choice to escape and exit often takes time and specialized support, and it is common for those experiencing domestic violence to need multiple attempts to exit. It's important that each exit attempt is validated and supported. Some programming has limitations on repeated engagement.
- Although there are similarities between domestic violence and trauma experienced by trafficked and exploited persons, survivors of trafficking often experience higher degree of sexual trauma than most survivors of domestic/intimate partner violence, and struggle in most domestic

violence programs. As a result, there needs to be a spectrum of services for those fleeing violent and exploitative situations. And specifically, survivors of human trafficking need to be able to access a housing model that incorporates and operates with trauma informed support and best practices, with harm reduction options for substance use.

- Many programs have tight timelines for first stage support (30-90 days), which does not allow adequate time to secure next stage housing.
- Most programs will focus on women with children, or single women, but we have identified that the need is for both populations. Additionally, we see the need to have supportive options for individuals who identify as women, gender fluid, or non-binary, as some programs have refused service to trans identifying women.
- Lastly, we have seen circumstances of intimate partner violence towards males, who then flee with children. We see a lack of supports for these unique circumstances, and encourage a consideration for both the men & the children involved.

Federal Funding

- In general, federal funding/programming toward women-serving shelters and transitional housing is low.
- We have found that federal funding programs often focus on new projects or capital funding, however, do not support the core operations or long term projects. If the federal scope of funding could be broadened this would provide organization an opportunity to focus more on the program and services rather than navigating multiple levels of bureaucracy in order to ensure funding. Additionally, we recommend funding longer term projects, to allow for growth and sustainability.
- Direct shelter funding, for women, survivors of violence, and survivors of exploitation, has not increased in many jurisdictions across the country for many years. As a result, programs to meet the needs of women and families fleeing violence and other personal issues are not being met. Further, costs for staffing, food and other expenses continue to rise.
- Projects tend to focus on urban centres, where the greater needs are in rural, northern, interior, and Indigenous communities.
- The needs of Indigenous persons varies, and we recommend projects that incorporate Indigenous leadership & alternative approaches to Western modalities.

Looking Forward

1. From our experience, the most common reason women and children are turned away from shelters is that they are at full capacity. We recommend:
 - a. Increase funding being made available for both new projects as well as ongoing programmatic/core operational support.
 - b. A centralized intake may assist in ensuring that more women who need shelter would be able to access nearby unoccupied beds, and increase efficiency of the system overall and offer greater safety for those who may be experience immediate threats.

- c. Higher accessibility for those in remote regions, including transportation option around highways and work camps, and options for poor weather conditions such as heavy snow or ice.
2. While women and families who access shelters may be safe while there, once they move on, there is no guarantee that they will not again experience abuse. We recommend:
 - a. Greater support for transitional and community for women exiting the shelter system is needed so as to ensure aftercare is maintained until stability is re-established.
 - b. More investment in affordable housing for women and children.
 - c. Programming that is inclusive of mental wellness and substance use/abuse.
3. Survivors of exploitation and human trafficking experience some of the most extreme forms of violence against women and intimate partner abuse. We recommend:
 - a. Survivors of human trafficking have access to programs and housing supports that are specially designed for their unique needs.
 - b. We recommend that any housing support models that service survivors of human trafficking be trauma sensitive, utilize psychosocial rehabilitation principles, and operate from an intersectional foundation.
4. For many, the justice and court system is complex, expensive and at times frightening to navigate. The Salvation Army recommends:
 - a. Strengthening justice responses and implementing additional protections and responses for people who experience family violence.
 - b. Additional training and professional development to build on the expertise of court professionals and staff to more effectively respond to complex family law matters. Specialization within courts may assist in responding to complex family court related matters.
 - c. Greater access to legal advocacy to support women and girls who may need personal representation or custody support.

Conclusion

In summary, The Salvation Army encourages greater funding and support for violence against women and intimate partner violence shelters and programming to enhance the protection, safety, and wellbeing of women and families who have experienced violence.

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to engage in further discussion on this matter as requested.