

## POLICY BRIEF

# Ending Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada

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### What's the issue?

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as domestic violence is a prevalent form of gender-based violence that causes harm in multiple ways by all parties involved (Government of Canada, 2022). While police-reported data demonstrates women are overrepresented in those who experience IPV, the true number is also underreported, as there are many who do not go to the police to report their experiences (Government of Canada, 2022). Those who experience IPV explain that they feel fear of shame and/or stigma, believe IPV should be a private matter, fear of court system, and general lack of trust of the criminal justice system (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Burczycka, 2018; Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that IPV is a global public health concern that affects millions of people, with lasting health, social, and economic consequences (World Health Organization, 2012). Furthermore, IPV impacts children and exposure to IPV is a form of child maltreatment. Despite current measures, IPV remains a problem and rates for certain types of violence have started to climb again like sexual assault (Statistics Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2018).

### Understanding the problem

IPV can occur in public, private, and online spaces and can come in a variety of ways. IPV includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, criminal harassment, financial abuse, spiritual, emotional/psychological abuse, reproductive coercion, coercive control, and technology-facilitated violence or cyberviolence (Government of Canada, 2022). Current law in the Criminal Code of Canada prohibits some forms of IPV like physical and sexual assault, emotional/psychological abuse, and financial abuse (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2019). Over the years, the Criminal Code has had amendments to include being able to charge their spouse with sexual assault, criminal harassment (stalking), and strengthening the term 'intimate partner,' the accused must prove to the court why they should be released should they have had a prior conviction, and every Canadian jurisdiction has implemented mandatory charging and prosecutorial policies for IPV (Government of Canada, 2022). This means that charging policies require the police to apply the same policy in all types of criminal offending, and that

### Scale of the problem

- 44% of women or 6.2 million women aged 15 and older have reported some kind of abuse in their intimate partner relationship (Government of Canada, 2022).
- Every six days, a woman in Canada is murdered by her intimate partner (Roy & Marcellus, 2019).
- It costs \$7.4 billion to deal with the aftermath of IPV (Department of Justice, 2009).
- Women are four times more likely to be afraid of their partners compared to men and/or experienced IPV (Roy & Marcellus, 2019).
- There are elevated risks of violence for women who may identify as women with disabilities, Indigenous, visible minority, and LGBTQ+ (Government of Canada, 2021).

the survivor is not responsible if charges are laid or whether there will be a trial (Government of Canada, 2022).

The current measures are for aftercare and not prevention, including women's shelters, transition houses, victim services, counselling, and sexual assault centres.

### **Recommendations**

- *Support through the Legal System:* To have the Federal government to provide funding at the provincial and territorial level, so that survivors can get free or low-cost legal advice and help.
- *Mandatory Sexual Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools.* Have the Federal government support provincial and territorial governments to ensure sexual health education is mandatory and funded throughout Canada. Early education should consist sexual education, healthy relationships, consent, boundaries, domestic violence awareness, online safety, and gender diversity (Courage to Act, 2021).
- *Immigration.* To have the Federal government to make policy changes that consider trauma and IPV. Survivors who are sponsored or brought over should have a separate pathway to citizenship without having to be afraid their sponsor will take it away and force them to stay (Courage to Act, 2021).
- *Increase Workplace Safety.* To have all levels of government work together to improve employment standards and government accountability to prevent, address, and respond to violence and/or harassment at the workplace such as recognizing violence and/or harassment is a workplace safety hazard and expand access for leave to 10 paid and 10 unpaid sick days (Dale, Maki, & Nitia, 2021). It should include measures that would protect the individual from retaliation (Courage to Act, 2021).
- *Housing.* For the Federal government to provide funding to provincial governments to invest and create safe and affordable housing, increase eligibility for subsidized housing and housing services, and services associated with housing e.g., shelters, transitional housing, housing services, etc. (Dale et al., 2021). Providing more affordable housing will allow more survivors to leave their abusive situations and rebuild their lives (Dale et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

IPV remains to be a prevalent issue in Canada and continues to increase in certain areas. The cost of taking care of IPV like child(ren) exposure, counselling, legal aid account for \$7.4 billion, which could be allocated for more services like prevention. Current law and policies have since expanded what constitutes as 'intimate partner' and policies around previous charges of the abuser, however, more services will be needed to prevent and provide wrap-around services. Recommendations require all levels of government to collaborate and implement policies that would ensure support in multiple areas to aid survivors in rebuilding their lives. This includes support through the legal system, mandatory sexual health education, upgraded immigration policies, updated workplace safety, and affordable housing

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