

**Brief on Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada**

Prepared by the Ending Violence Association of Canada for submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on its Study on Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence

March 27, 2022

## **About the Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada)**

The Ending Violence Association of Canada (EVA Canada) is a national organization that works to address and respond to gender-based violence. EVA Canada strives to strengthen collaboration among national, provincial, and territorial organizations to build understanding about gender-based violence and advocate at the national level. With representation from sexual assault centres, sexual assault regional and provincial networks, and other organizations engaged in addressing sexual violence from across the country, much of EVA Canada's work focuses on the issue of sexual violence. EVA Canada members have a long history of advocating for changes, providing education and prevention training, and supporting survivors as they attempt to navigate complex and difficult systems.

## **Recommendations**

We offer the following recommendations to the Committee on the Status of Women on its study of intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada.

### **1. Efforts to address intimate partner and domestic violence, as well as other forms of gender-based violence, must be begin with the development and implementation of the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence (NAP).**

In order to make real change in lessening intimate partner and domestic violence (IPV and DV), there must be a shift in focus from providing reactionary, short-term solutions to tackling the systemic and root causes of gender-based violence (GBV). This requires a whole-of-government, cross-sectoral, and cross-jurisdictional approach to addressing GBV – an approach that could be accomplished through the development of the NAP. As a national organization, EVA Canada has the opportunity to hear from its member organizations about the similarities and disparities in services and supports across the country, and we are particularly attuned to the way in which these inconsistencies in supports are most deeply felt by those most marginalized. As one of over 40 organizations and advocates that contributed to the development of the *Roadmap for the National Action Plan* report, we urge the committee to promote timely action on the resourcing and implementation of the NAP, and the 100 recommendations already set out in this report.<sup>1</sup> The NAP is more than a tool for addressing the patchwork of services that exist for survivors of GBV; it is a framework that has the potential to tackle the root causes of GBV, and make real gains in lessening the systemic inequalities that allow GBV to happen.

### **2. Strategies for addressing IPV and DV cannot be limited to criminal justice responses.**

Changes to legislation and the criminal justice system may provide some support for some individuals experiencing IPV and DV. Nonetheless, in exploring justice-based responses to IPV and DV, it is imperative that the committee keep the following realities in mind:

---

<sup>1</sup> See the [Roadmap to the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence Report](#) for a detailed framework and recommendations for the development and implementation of the NAP.

- The vast majority of those who experience GBV do not report violence or engage with the legal or criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> As such, adequate resources and supports must be made available for survivors who do not engage with the criminal justice system, and should not be dependent on a survivor's participation in this system. This includes resources for alternative justice models, such as community-based restorative and transformative justice approaches.
- Intersectional analysis is necessary in examining the potential effectiveness and unintended consequences of justice-based responses to DV and IPV. This includes examining and addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, racism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination within the criminal justice system.
- Legislative and criminal justice responses to DV and IPV should they be implemented must be accompanied with adequate resourcing to allow for the necessary training for all actors within the justice system, including police. Development and implementation of such measures should be done in consultation with external GBV advocates.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Sexual violence and the expertise of sexual assault support centres must be included in studies on IPV and DV.**

Acts of sexualized violence are one tactic of abuse that occurs within the context of dating violence, domestic and intimate partner violence, and family violence. While 30% of women report experiencing sexual assault in their lifetimes, most will be victimized by someone they know. Sexual assault is the third most reported type of violence within relationships (after physical assault and threatening behaviors), and 20% of women whose intimate partners commit sexual violence against them report experiencing this form of violence monthly or more within the past 12 months – a finding that is particularly troubling given the severity of this form of intimate partner violence.<sup>4</sup> The impacts associated with sexual violence require specialized supports and responses; however, the distinct needs of survivors of sexual violence can sometimes be overlooked in broader discussions about intimate partner and domestic violence.

In addition to the network of shelters and transition houses that provide vital services to survivors across the country, there is also an extensive network of community-based sexual assault centres that provide crisis and long-term counselling, prevention and education.<sup>5</sup> Community-based sexual assault centres are a central part of the support system available to survivors of IPV and DV; however, like shelters and transition houses, these organizations have long been facing funding constraints that make it increasingly difficult to meet the demand for

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, Statistics Canada reports that only 5% of victims of sexual violence report violence to the police. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2019/apr01.html>.

<sup>3</sup> For additional details and insights about justice systems response to IPV and DV, see [Roadmap to the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence Report](#), pgs. 63-95. See also the following report prepared by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, [The Shadow Pandemic: Stopping Coercive and Controlling Behaviour in Intimate Relationships](#).

<sup>4</sup> See Statistics Canada, Section 3: Police reported intimate partner violence in Canada, 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00001/03-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup> For a list of community-based sexual assault centres and other sexual assault centres see <https://endingviolencecanada.org/sexual-assault-centres-crisis-lines-and-support-services/>

services.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, we encourage the committee to include consideration of the distinct needs of sexual violence survivors and the organizations that support them as part of its current and future studies.

#### **4. The needs of frontline community-based anti-violence workers and volunteers within the GBV sector in Canada must be addressed.**

Over the course of the pandemic, those working within the GBV sector faced many additional challenges related to service provision.<sup>7</sup> Despite the complex and emotionally difficult work that those working within the GBV sector perform, their work continues to be largely undervalued. Many of those within the GBV workforce continue to lack access to competitive wages, extended health-care benefits, pensions, and training opportunities. This is not an oversight of the organizations employing those within the sector; rather, the precarity of this work is an extension of the chronic underfunding of the sector and the systemic devaluing of this form of labour that continues to be overwhelmingly performed by women. In studying and making recommendations on addressing IPV and DV, the need to develop stronger occupational health and safety supports for gender-based violence workforce must also be addressed.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

We hope that these recommendations can further strengthen the Committee's study on IPV and DV, and we welcome the opportunity to provide additional input in the ongoing work of the Committee. Every day that we delay action is another day that we make it even more difficult for those experiencing violence to build the lives, families, and communities they want to create. We urge the Committee to emphasize this need for immediate action, and to stress the importance of taking concrete steps toward implementing these recommendations.

Erin Whitmore  
Executive Director  
Ending Violence Association of Canada

---

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the role that community-based sexual assault centres play in supporting survivors of gender-based violence see: <https://endingviolencecanada.org/10-reasons-why-additional-funding-during-covid-19-is-important-for-sexual-assault-centres/>

<sup>7</sup> To learn more about the experiences of GBV frontline workers during the pandemic, see the following report of a national survey conducted by EVA Canada and Anova involving 376 gender-based violence workers and volunteers. <https://endingviolencecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FINAL.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> For more information about the federal government's role in supporting the GBV workforce, and a list of recommendations see the following report from the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime: <https://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/CBAV-MTCV/index.html>