

Women's Safety*

Strategic Overview

Municipalities strive to ensure the safety and quality of life of all their citizens. There is a clear requirement to ensure that services and resources are balanced in terms of both the needs of both women and men. However, the impact of crime and violence on women's and men's lives can be very different. Women are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault, and are more likely than men to express concerns about their ability to move about the city in safety. Women are also much more likely than men to experience serious violence in intimate relationships. Municipalities can have a major impact on the safety of women and girls by developing careful strategic approaches, and investing in programmes and support services.

Women's safety in the city is not only about violence in domestic situations, it is also about being able to go to work, and to enjoy the city without fear and insecurity, both in the day and at night. It is about preventing violence and sexual harassment in public spaces and workplaces, as well as in homes and between relations or intimate partners. Such violence is now widely regarded as a violation of human rights and an issue of gender equality, and as a threat to public health.

A number of creative steps have been taken by municipalities in recent years to ensure that there are services in place for women who are victims of intimate violence, to increase the safety of women in public spaces, and to sensitize professionals and the public about the issues. A number of Canadian cities have implemented specific programmes which take account of the different needs and experiences of women and men, and outside Canada there are some excellent municipal programmes which work in partnership with the community. Making cities safer for women helps to make them safer for everyone.

Action for Municipal Stakeholders

1. Set up a consultative and central committee within the municipal structure to work with other sectors and local community organizations, to plan and implement strategies on women's safety with health, social, family, environmental, housing, justice services etc;
2. Ensure that data collection looks at both genders separately, so that analysis of patterns, causes, and decisions about how to tackle the problems can be made more accurately and easily;
3. Develop a comprehensive strategy with a range of preventive programmes to reduce insecurity and promote women's safety in public and private;
4. Include programmes that work with boys and men to shape attitudes about the use of male violence against women;
5. Allocate resources on a regular and not a pilot basis.

* Prepared by Margaret Shaw, International Centre for the Prevention of Crime

Justification

The Challenge

Violence against women, or gender-based violence, is now widely recognized as an issue of public concern. It continues to occur, and remains a challenge to all communities across Canada.

It includes sexual harassment and assault, physical violence, stalking, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and the insecurity associated with the threat of violence.

Gender-based violence is violence which is learned. It is based on social and cultural attitudes about what is acceptable behaviour, and can, therefore, be prevented.

Violence against women occurs in private and intimate relationships, work environments, and public spaces. It is not just about domestic violence, but also their safety in the community and the city.

Getting an accurate picture of the extent of such violence in our communities is not easy. Many women are reluctant to report incidents of public or private violence to the police or other authorities. Victimization surveys help to give a more reliable picture of the extent of violence experienced by women and girls, and their levels of insecurity.

- Intimate violence and violence against women and girls
 - 460,000 women were sexually assaulted in one year – a rate of 3.5% per 100,000 for women over the age of 15.¹
 - Only 8% of these sexual assaults were reported to the police.
 - Women are at greater risk of serious spousal assault, stalking and homicide than men.²
 - 83% of spousal assaults reported to the police involve males assaulting females.³
 - In 2007, 51 women and 13 men were killed by their current or former spouse.⁴
 - Aboriginal women are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of spousal assault.⁵
- Safety in public space
 - 16% of women report feeling unsafe while walking alone in their urban area after dark, and 58% are worried about their safety while waiting for or using public transport.
 - Over 500 women, many of them Aboriginal, have disappeared from towns and communities in Canada in recent years.⁶

Reasons for not reporting intimate partner violence to the police:

- A belief the police wouldn't be able to do anything about it
- Feelings of shame, not wanting others to know about it
- She dealt with it herself
- Fear of the offender
- A belief that the incident wasn't serious enough to involve the police.

(Johnson, Ollus & Nevala, 2008)

¹ Criminal Victimization in Canada 2004. *Juristat*, Statistics Canada. 85-002-X. 2005.

² Statistics Canada 2005e. While intimate violence affects men too, women in intimate relationships are much more likely than men to be the victims of serious assault, and to be injured, hospitalized or killed. See Johnson (2007) 'Preventing Violence against Women: Progress and Challenges' *IPC Review* 2.

³ Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2008. 85-224-XIE.

⁴ Homicide in Canada, 2007. *Juristat* Statistics Canada 85-002-X 2008.

⁵ Violence against Aboriginal Women. Statistics Canada, Statistical Profile 85-570-X, 2006.

- Adolescent girls and young adults are at greatest risk of sexual assault.

A recent World Health Organization study of domestic violence, and the *International Victimization Survey on Violence Against Women*, have both confirmed the extent of gender-based violence in a wide range of countries.⁷

Insecurity and fear of violence or harassment can limit mobility of women and girls, and restrict their work or educational choices.

Violence itself has huge social and economic costs for everyone in the municipality. Estimates of the health and social service costs of violence against women in Canada are **\$4.2billion** a year.⁸

An Australian study estimates the costs of domestic violence as \$1.5billion - an average of \$10,000 per case; in the US the costs of public and private violence have been estimated at over \$5.8 billion a year, of which \$4.1billion is for direct health costs. (Henderson (2000); & Centres for Disease Control (2006).)

Providing services for victims of intimate violence has rightly been a priority, as well as training local professionals such as the police and service workers to improve responses to incidents.

Less attention has been given to *preventing* intimate violence, and to *preventing* violence on the streets, at work and in public spaces. Prevention and treatment are both necessary, but prevention is more cost effective.

Policies on intimate violence are often isolated from other municipal sectors, and from work to improve women's safety in public space.⁹ But public and private violence against women are closely linked, so policies need to be linked with other services such as housing, urban planning and transport. And because they both stem from attitudes towards women, prevention policies need to include both genders - men and women.

Municipalities do not always have good data about the extent of violence against women and levels of insecurity, and where they occur. The risk of violence against women includes individual, relationship, community and societal factors. Risks also vary between local neighbourhoods and communities. Women who are very isolated, recent immigrants, Aboriginal women, young women, elderly or disabled women, those working in the sex trade, may all be at risk in different ways.

The Role of Municipalities – A City Strategy

Ensuring women's safety in public or private requires a strategy with a *range of preventive approaches*. A lot of experience and research is now available on how this can be achieved.¹⁰ It is important to have

⁶ Sisters in Spirit Register, Native Women's Association of Canada. www.nwac-hq.org

⁷ WHO Multi-country study 2005; Johnson, Ollus and Nevala 2008. *Violence Against Women. An International Perspective*. New York: Springer.

⁸ Greaves, Hankivsky & Kingston-Reichers (1995) *Selected Estimates of the Cost of Violence Against Women*. London, ON: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women & Children.

⁹ Shaw and Andrews, 'Engendering crime prevention' *Canadian Journal of Criminology* (2005).

¹⁰ Shaw & Capobianco (2004) *Developing Trust: International Approaches to Women's Safety*, ICPC, Montreal; Shaw & Andrews, (2005) op. cit.; Johnson, op. cit. (2007); *International Report on Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 2008. (2008a) Montreal: ICPC.

strong and supportive national and provincial or territorial policies, but violence occurs in local communities so there is a major role for cities and local authorities.

Cities have worked in an integrated manner with a range of local services and institutions: health, education, housing, employment, community and social services, urban development and recreation, as well as the police. They have worked in partnership with local community organizations and the private sector.

Working in partnerships, cities have been able to develop a comprehensive range of preventive programmes including: health services, situational and environmental approaches; public education campaigns to raise awareness about women's safety; development of protocols; skills training for local employees and professionals; and supporting school curriculum programmes to help change attitudes and behaviour towards violence against women and girls.

Municipal Examples of City Strategies and Partnerships for Women's Safety

A number of Canadian municipalities provide some good examples. The City of Montreal has had a city-community consultative working group on women's safety since the early 1990's. An extensive range of services and programmes aim to increase feelings of safety for women on the streets, and reduce violence against women in private and public space. In terms of public safety, these range from close co-operation with women's groups in the design and redevelopment of public areas such as Metro stations and parks, the production of a guide on urban design for women's safety, to the 'Between Two Stops' system which allows women to get off buses close to their destination in the evenings.¹¹

Programmes include partnerships between the city social, health and community services or the municipal police (SPVM) and community-based organizations. The organization *Pro-gram inc.* provides front line service to men arrested for domestic violence, in collaboration with the SPVM; *Stella, Maimie's Friend* works closely with Montreal's social and health services to help prevent violence against sex trade workers.

The City of Toronto is a pioneer of safe cities for women. It developed a municipal strategy document on preventing public violence against women in the 1980's and in 1991 the *Take Back Toronto* initiative.¹² It has worked closely with organizations such as METRAC, which developed the women's safety audit as a tool to empower women to work with local municipalities to make their neighbourhoods safer.¹³ The *Breaking the Cycle of Violence Programme* initiated many projects among diverse minority groups to prevent violence against women.

The City of Ottawa, funds the *Women's Initiative for Safer Environments*, or WISE, and the city works with the *City for All Women Initiative* (CAWI). WISE has also developed the use of women's safety audits as participatory tools for women in local communities to analyse environments, and work with local government in improving safety. WISE raises awareness about the personal safety of women and girls

¹¹ Michaud, (2008) 'A comprehensive approach based on local partnerships & women's empowerment.' In *Women's Safety: A Shared Global Concern. Proceedings of the ICPC 2008 Colloquium* (2008c); *Pour un environnement urbain sécuritaire: guide d'aménagement*. (2002). Montreal: City of Montreal.

¹² *Take Back Toronto: A guide to preventing violence against women in your community*. (1991). Toronto: City of Toronto.

¹³ Shaw & Andrews, (2005) op. cit.. Women's Safety Audits are sometimes called 'Exploratory walks', and involve groups of women walking around to assess the safety of a neighbourhood.

through workshops, and helps develop community action plans, and improve urban design. CAWI works on issues of equality and the inclusion of all women in city services and development.

The Region of Waterloo established its *Family Violence Project* on 2006, bringing together ten different local partners in one place, including the police and municipal services, to provide better protection, responses and supports in domestic violence situations. There have been some immediate cost savings and improvements in services, public confidence and case resolution.

The City of Edmonton and Edmonton Police Service work in a number of cross-sector teams including *Spousal Violence Intervention* and *Elder Abuse*, and partner with a Community Initiatives Against Family Violence group. *Safedmonton's Sexual Exploitation Working Group* initiated a project to provide community support to women arrested on the street.

Public Awareness and Changing Attitudes

Community education programmes can be effective in changing attitudes towards violence. The City of Charlottetown *Family Violence Prevention Programme*, is a partnership approach under the strong leadership of the Mayor. The project won an international award in 2004.¹⁴ The programme began in 2001 and includes a permanent Purple Ribbon on the town hall, training for all city staff, including elected officials, to raise awareness about violence, public advertisements on buses and city fire and utility vehicles, and a series of community events throughout the year. The Father and Sons event is sponsored by the private sector. Referral cards and information kits accompany the training. Since 2001, more than 80% of city employees have taken part in the training programme.

In London, Ontario, a *Mayor's Task Force to End Women Abuse* was recently established to implement the Charlottetown approach. In almost 40 Ontario municipalities, a public awareness campaign called *Neighbours, Friends and Family* has been implemented to alert people to the signs of intimate violence, and make people aware of where they can turn for help.¹⁵ London is the site of the *Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System*,¹⁶ a model for improved criminal justice responses to domestic violence. The *Muslim Family Safety Project*, a community-based project created in 2005 works with local agencies to assist women from Muslim communities and backgrounds in domestic violence situations, and expand awareness and public education.¹⁷

The *Peel Committee Against Women Abuse* and the *Peel Committee on Sexual Assault* work closely with the municipalities of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon to provide services and public education to communities where 43% of the population are recent immigrants from some 100 countries.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Women's Safety Awards 2004*. Montreal: WICI; ICPC Colloquium Proceedings (2008c) op. cit.; Johnson, (2007) op. cit.

¹⁵ www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca

¹⁶ Formerly the London Family Court Clinic. www.lfcc.on.ca

¹⁷ Baobaid, M. (2007). A overview of the Muslim Family Safety Project. Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System. London: University of Western Ontario and see ICPC *International Compendium of Crime Prevention Practices*. (2008b) ICPC: Montreal. www.crime-prevention-intl.org

¹⁸ *Building Community-Based Partnerships for Local Action on Women's Safety*. (2007). Montreal: WICI.

School-Based Programs

Programmes to change attitudes through schools have also been initiated in a number of cities, and some have been evaluated with good results. Examples include curriculum-based programmes such as the 'Fourth R' in London, Ontario and now implemented in 350 Ontario schools and six other provinces, the 'Roots of Empathy' in a number of provinces, 'Vers le pacific' in Quebec, and the Saltspring Island, BC 'Education is Prevention' programme, which all aim to build healthy and non-violent gender relationships between girls and boys.¹⁹

Networks to Share Experience and Tools

Some of the most innovative projects on women's safety involve municipal governments working with local community partners. They play a crucial role in raising attention to violence against women, and increasing women's participation in local decision-making and local government.

In Canada, *Women in Cities International* is an important resource supporting projects at the local government level.²⁰ It works with networks of women's organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and India. In Canada it has worked with women's organizations to build partnerships with their municipal governments in Charlottetown, Bellechasse, Gatineau, Kuujuaq, Montreal, Peel, Regina and Williams Lake.²¹ A current project is looking at safety issues for Aboriginal women in Regina, elderly women in Gatineau, disabled women in Montreal, and those in very diverse minority and recent immigrant communities in Peel.

International Support for Municipalities

Outside Canada there are many good municipal examples of strategies to reduce violence against women, in European cities such as Goteburg, Sweden, Melbourne, Australia, and Bogota, Rosario and Santiago in Latin America, Petrozavodsk, Russia, New Delhi, India, Durban, South Africa and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.²² The UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme sees women's safety as a priority, and argues that 'a city which is safe for women is safe for all'.

Resources: Tools to Support Action

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the City of Montreal published a guide for municipal governments in 2004 on achieving gender equality. It outlines the kinds of structures which help ensure that gender issues are integrated across all municipal sectors.²³ The Cities of Ottawa and Vancouver have also produced guides on gender equality. Canada has been a world leader in the use of women's safety audits. The City of Montreal published a toolkit *Boîte à utiles: de la dépendance à l'autonomie*, and the City of Lévis a guide (Carnet d'enquête) for use during a women's safety audit.²⁴

¹⁹ See Johnson 2007 op. cit.

²⁰ Women in Cities International www.womenincities.org

²¹ See Building Community-Based Partnerships (2007) op. cit.

²² See *Women's Safety Audits: What Works and Where?* (2008) UN-HABITAT & WICI; ICPC Colloquium Proceedings (2008c) op. cit.

²³ A City Tailored to Women. (2004). FCM & City of Montreal. FCM International Centre for Municipal Development www.icmd-cidm.ca or www.womenincities.org

²⁴ UN-HABITAT & WICI (2008) op. cit.; Michaud (2008) op. cit.

Women in Cities International (WICI), based in Montreal, maintains a web-site with a wide range of Canadian and international on-line resources and tools on promoting the safety of women.

The *International Centre for the Prevention of Crime* (ICPC) held its 2008 Colloquium on *Women's Safety: A Shared Global Concern.*, which includes a Compendium of practices and policies, and its first *International Report on Crime Prevention & Community Safety 2008* which has a chapter of women's safety. This includes a report on the findings of International Survey of Violence Against Women.²⁵

The *Key to Safer Municipalities* tool kit developed for Canadian municipalities by ICPC and the Foundation Philippe Pinel also provides specific guidance on planning women's safety initiatives, and some practical examples from Canada and elsewhere. Other resources can be found through the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (IPC) and the European Forum for Urban Safety (EFUS).²⁶ A comprehensive handbook on safety, gender and violence prevention has recently been published.²⁷ The experience of municipalities in many countries is that more is needed than toolkits and reports. Training, professional development and sharing experience are essential.

²⁵ Johnson et al., in ICPC (2008c) op. cit.

²⁶ www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/ipc ; www.fesu.org

²⁷ Whitzman (2008). *A Handbook on Community Safety, Gender and Violence Prevention. Practical Planning Tools*. London: Earthscan.