

Gender-based violence is an urgent issue

Gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual assault and intimate partner violence, is an urgent health and safety issue for women and girls, and one that continues to be seriously neglected in the justice and the health care systems, as well as in workplaces in BC.

WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

The federal government defines gender-based violence as the use and abuse of control over another person and is perpetrated against someone based on their gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. GBV— including violence against women and girls—can take many forms:

- physical violence;
- sexual violence (including sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual exploitation);
- emotional and psychological violence (including put downs, bullying, threats, and intimidation);
- harassment (including stalking);
- online violence/technology-facilitated violence;
- financial abuse;
- spiritual abuse; and
- structural/systemic violence.

Intimate partner violence is sometimes known as domestic violence, spouse assault or family violence and is most often a form of GBV.

GBV is linked to sexist attitudes and behaviours and is made worse by other forms of discrimination such as racism, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and biphobia. As such, some populations are more at risk, including: women and girls, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2 and gender non-conforming people, those living in rural and remote communities, people with disabilities, persons of color, newcomers, seniors, women working in under-represented sectors, migrant workers, sex workers and undocumented workers.



HOW DOES CANADA RANK INTERNATIONALLY?

- The World Economic Forum's 2016 gender-gap report ranked Canada 35th worst out of 44 countries.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that Canada ranks 4th worst out of 32 countries for the number of women assaulted in the workplace.
- The 2015 UN gender-equity index ranked Canada 25th—in 1995, Canada was first.
- In November 2016, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women called on Canada to do more to address GBV and women's equity.

WHAT DO CANADIANS SAY?'

In 2016 the federal government conducted a public consultation on GBV. Among the findings:

- More than half of all women will be affected by or be a victim of GBV in their lifetime;
- Women are 11 times more likely than men to be the target of police-reported sexual violence;
- In 2002, the highest rate of sexual victimization reported to police was girls aged 11 to 19;
- 39% of women, aged 18 years and older, have suffered a sexual assault at least once since the age of 16;
- Women are four times more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Young women, aged 15-34 years, have the highest risk of experiencing violence;
- Indigenous women are three times more likely than non-indigenous women to be victims;
- Indigenous women are more than three times as likely to report intimate partner violence than non-indigenous women;
- GBV has a disproportionate impact on LGBTQ2 and gender non-conforming people:
 - Gay, lesbian or bisexual individuals are three times more likely than heterosexual to report violence,
 - Transgendered people are nearly twice as likely as cisgendered women to experience intimate partner violence;
- Women living with physical or cognitive impairments experience GBV two to three times more frequently;
- 59% more senior women than senior men are victims of family violence; and
- In a 2014 national survey, one third of Canadian workers reported experiencing intimate partner (domestic) violence in their lifetime.²

SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

Experiencing violence can have devastating health and social impacts on the lives of individuals, families, communities and British Columbia as a whole.

The full extent of the impacts of GBV is not known as the majority of incidents go unreported. For example, in 2014, just 5% of sexual assault survivors reported the incident to police. However, recent Canadian surveys and consultations provide an indication of the gravity of the problem.

HUMAN COSTS

Violence can have significant and long-term effects on a person's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health across their whole lifetime. These impacts may include: serious injury and disease e.g., serious inflammatory and autoimmune disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress impacts, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, miscarriage, substance use, absence from work, job loss, social isolation, and death by suicide or homicide.

ECONOMIC COSTS

- Intimate partner violence against Canadian women costs our country \$4.8 billion annually.
- Sexual assault and harassment against Canadian women is estimated to cost \$3.6 billion annually.

WORKPLACE COSTS

The direct and indirect costs of violence in the workplace are immeasurable. The impact of workplace violence is felt throughout society. In addition to the human cost of physical and emotional injury, there is a financial cost for medical care, compensation for lost work days, worker turnover and lost productivity.

In the past 10 years in BC, there has been a 70% increase in violence (including GBV, sexual violence and intimate partner violence) related workers' compensation claims—this only represents those incidents that were reported and accepted. Workers in health care and social services make up approximately 63% of claims for violence related injury or illness in all BC sectors. Of these, 86% are women. The "silence breakers" of the recent movements such as #MeToo have just begun to illuminate the magnitude of sexual violence incidents in the workplace. These violent acts remain largely unreported and are not reflected in the existing statistics.

In addition, complaints of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, grows exponentially each year. Since the WCB began keeping records of bullying and harassment related claims in 2013, there has been an average of 43 time-loss claims per year. Claim costs increased by 400% from just over \$590,000 in 2013 to more than \$2.3 million in 2015. The total time-loss claims accepted for all forms of workplace violence in 2015 was 2,106 – averaging nearly six new claims per day and total claims costs of nearly \$44.5 million.

The federal government's 2017 inquiry into workplace violence and harassment found that harassment and sexual violence in workplaces are underreported, often due to fear of retaliation, and that when they are reported, they are not dealt with effectively. The need to address it from a perspective of GBV and other forms of discrimination was evidenced by the fact that 94% of those who reported experiencing sexual harassment were women, while people with disabilities and members of a visible minority were more likely to experience harassment than other groups.³

According to a study conducted by the Canadian Labour Congress, intimate partner violence is also a significant workplace issue:

- 54% of respondents had violence occurring at or near their workplace;
- 82% reported it negatively affected their work performance;
- 40% were prevented from getting to work;
- 8% lost jobs as a result of abuse; and
- 37% of coworkers were impacted.

FEDERAL RESPONSE TO GBV

Through the summer and fall of 2016, the Government of Canada conducted consultations with Canadians with respect to a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women. A comprehensive study on women had not been done Federally since 1995.⁴

The Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women, announced *It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence* in June 2017.⁵

1. Sources: <http://natoassociation.ca/gender-based-violence-in-canada-a-case-for-concern/> and <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/gbv-vfs-en.html>

2. See the report: *Can Work be Safe, When Home Isn't? Initial Findings of a Pan-Canadian Survey on Domestic Violence and the Workplace*, retrieved from: <http://canadianlabour.ca/issues-research/domestic-violence-work/report> [CLC study]

3. See the report: *Harassment and Sexual Violence in the Workplace Public Consultations: What we Heard*, retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/health-safety/reports/workplace-harassment-sexual-violence.html>

4. See the report: *Breaking the Silence: The Final Report of the Engagement Process for the Federal Strategy to Address Gender-based Violence*, retrieved from: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/breaking-briser-en.html>

5. See Status of Women website: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/index-en.html>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BC

The BC Federation of Labour proposes a few initial steps that the province of British Columbia can take to begin to address GBV:

1. Implement a cross-sector coordinated province-wide response to sexual assault, including the justice, health and community services sectors.
2. Introduce paid leave provisions for survivors of sexual violence and intimate partner violence.
3. Increase workplace prevention requirements by explicitly naming violence—including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, bullying and harassment—as workplace hazards in the *Workers' Compensation Act*.
4. Eliminate minimum wage exemptions that disproportionately effect women and contribute to other forms of exploitation, harassment and violence.



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The British Columbia Federation of Labour represents over 500,000 members working in every corner of the province, and in every sector of the economy.

The BCFED has a long and proud history of fighting for the rights of all working people.

The goals of the BCFED are best exemplified by its slogan: *“What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all.”*

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