

# A Case for Ending Violence against Women



## Background

*Be the Peace . . . Make a Change* is a grassroots community peace-building initiative of [Second Story Women's Centre](#), funded by Status of Women Canada to develop a coordinated community response to reduce violence against women and girls in Lunenburg County and surrounding communities. The 3-year project (April 2012 - March 2015), is based on collaborative partnerships, community engagement and inclusion of men and boys as essential partners with women and girls in ending relationship violence.

Relationship violence is a product of the structures, and social and cultural environments we create and support. It is a complex issue - elusive and most often hiding in secrecy, shame, fear, stigma and guilt. At the same time, it is also normalized in mass culture, especially for youth, as evidenced by music videos, popular video games, TV, film, advertising, and the multi-billion dollar pornography industry. Gender roles, sex and violence are huge social and cultural influences in our lives.

While it is important to note that most relationship violence is committed by men toward women, we recognize that most men are *not* violent and have an important role to play in influencing other men. Violence against women is not just a women's issue - it is a community issue, a public health issue and a human issue that has dire costs to the entire community, including employers. Doing everything we can to eliminate violence against women is therefore not only a moral imperative, but also sound economic policy!

In this brief, we examine the issue, the impacts, the costs to women, most of whom are employed, their families, their workplaces and also to the systems in which we all work and live. Businesses are influential players in community life and therefore have an important role in either perpetuating or ending gender-based violence. Several recommendations and offers are included to foster partnerships with the business community in making Lunenburg County a safe haven and productive environment for all women and girls.

## The Issue

The United Nations Population Fund (2005) describes gender-based violence as perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

Consider the statistics (from various data sources):

- One in three women worldwide will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. (*Women's Health Coalition*)
- Only 1/3 of domestic violence situations are ever reported to police.
- More than 90% of sexual assaults are never reported to police. Most sexual assaults happen to girls/young women less than 24 years of age.

- Evidence suggests a woman is assaulted by her spouse an average of 35 times before she contacts the police. The reluctance to report, disclose or seek help is fueled by the very real threat of further and more severe violence and isolation.
- While men and boys can also be victims of relationship violence and sexual assault, women experience more of the most serious forms of both, including being beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or knife. They also suffer greater physical and emotional consequences as a result of the violence.<sup>1</sup>

***In Canada:***

- The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 4 women in Canada will experience intimate partner violence or sexual violence in her lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Other estimates indicate that it is as high as 50% of Canadian women.
- A woman is raped in Canada every 17 minutes<sup>3</sup> and an average of one to two women a week are murdered by their intimate partners.
- 70% of Canadian women who report having experienced spousal violence are working women and 71% have a university or college degree.<sup>4</sup>
- One-third of Canadians who report experiencing sexual assault have household incomes of more than \$100,000.<sup>5</sup>
- Every year in Canada, up to 360,000 children are exposed to domestic violence resulting in emotional trauma, depression, injury and permanent disability, as well as other physical, psychological and behavioural problems that can extend into adolescence and adulthood.
- Over half of sexual assault victims in 2007 were children under the age of 18.

***In Nova Scotia:***

- Nova Scotia has the highest rates of sexual assault in the country, at a rate of 40 per 1,000 in the population aged 15 and over (compared to 21 per 1000 for all of Canada), with females comprising approximately 85% of all sexual assault victims.<sup>6</sup>
- Nova Scotia also has the lowest rate of charges, prosecution and convictions for sexual assault.
- Alcohol is involved in the majority of sexual assaults by victim and/or perpetrator and in all cases seen by Avalon Sexual Assault Centre in Halifax involving girls between the ages of 12-15 years in Nova Scotia (*Avalon Sexual Assault Centre*).
- Since 1990, there have been 48 confirmed cases of women killed by intimate partners in Nova Scotia. (*Silent Witness*)
- In 2009, a one-day snap shot of 402 adult male offenders in Nova Scotia correctional facilities revealed just under one third were in custody for domestic violence including 100 offenders who were considered to be at high risk of lethality (*N.S. Advisory Council on the Status of Women*).

### ***In Lunenburg County:***

- Based on national and provincial statistics, the number of women experiencing intimate partner violence in Lunenburg County is estimated to be in the thousands (for the population of women over the age of 15).

### **Analysis**

Violence against women includes physical, verbal, emotional, financial, spiritual, psychological abuse and sexual assault and harassment. While any of these may have devastating long term physical and emotional consequences to women's health and wellbeing, only assault (physical or sexual) or uttering threats appear in the Criminal Code, leaving our justice system with few tools to address other forms of abuse.

Relationship violence affects younger women and older women and knows no social, economic or cultural boundaries. Even after leaving an abusive relationship, the danger to a woman does not end; in fact, the risk escalates in the first 6-12 months after leaving the relationship, often resulting in further physical or emotional trauma and even death.

When women are so profoundly affected by violence in relationships, it is not surprising that it impacts their participation and engagement in many aspects of life and society (Johnson et al. 2008).

- Victims of spousal violence who leave violent relationships may face years of poverty and insecurity.<sup>7</sup>
- A recent study found women who had left abusive domestic partners relied on food banks at nearly 20 times the rate of average Canadians, up to 3 years after leaving the abusive situation.<sup>7</sup>
- Victims of sexual assault report long-term mental health impacts, resulting in lost education, work and income<sup>7</sup>
- Among women, the links between stress, sexual violence and other trauma and subsequent mental health and addiction problems are staggering, pronounced and profound, leading to chronic health and mental health problems and substance use 4-15 times higher than in the general public.
- The impact of trauma from intimate partner violence and/or sexual violence can include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as severe and debilitating as that experienced by soldiers in conflict zones.
- For employers, this may mean lost productivity, excessive absenteeism, stress leaves, reduced output from their employees and loss of leadership potential.

### **The Costs**

Two studies provide estimates of the economic cost of intimate-partner violence in Canada. The 2012 Justice Canada report *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada* identifies the total cost of intimate partner violence in Canada as \$7.4 billion per year. These costs may include both the direct costs, such as medical care, police services, legal bills, costs of moving multiple times, safety measures, childcare, counseling, medications, debts, work absenteeism, lost productivity, as well as estimates for pain and suffering, the longer term consequences to children, and continuing health, mental health, addictions, social, economic and legal problems experienced by women even after they leave the relationship.

*The Gap in the Gender Gap* report from Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2013, cites the direct costs of intimate partner violence in Canada to be \$1.9 billion per year. For sexual assault, the costs are estimated at \$546 million per year, but since only 8% of sexual assaults are reported to police, it is likely underestimated to a significant degree.

Based on this information and the 2011 Census data, the combined cost of adult sexual assault and intimate partner violence, at \$334 per person in Canada, means the overall burden to our local Lunenburg County economy and systems amounts to approximately \$18.5 million!

Ending violence against women is not only a moral imperative, but it also makes sound economic sense. Imagine what we could accomplish in Lunenburg County with that \$18.5 million!

“We need to make the case that preventing violence against women is not only the right thing to do, it is good for business as well,” said Todd Minerson, Executive Director of the White Ribbon Campaign in Toronto, a global movement of men working to end violence against women and girls.

### **A Coordinated Community Response**

Research indicates that when a community coordinates its efforts to protect and support victims of violence and their families, and to hold abusers accountable, violence is reduced. Coordination ensures that the systems that are in place work more effectively by providing services and protection in a respectful, compassionate and timely manner. It also promotes a common understanding of the roots and the extent of intimate partner violence and sexual assault in a community and a society. The result is a shared intolerance of violence and a move toward more peaceful homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

The justice/legal system, women’s centres, transition houses, men’s intervention programs, health care personnel (doctors, nurses, emergency room personnel, mental health and addictions services), the school system, government at all levels, local businesses, the media, employers and clergy are essential partners in a coordinated community response.

### **Be the Peace - A Lunenburg County Response**

The *Be the Peace* project has been working with a wide variety of people, agencies, organizations, government and institutions to raise public and private discussions about the issue of relationship violence and to partner together to address it.

Two public forums (July 2012, and April 2013) were held to engage community members in devising solutions to this complex issue. From the forums, a dozen working groups were established to address specific issues related to violence. At this midway point in the 3-year project the most promising areas are:

- Partnerships to create responsive sexual assault services in Lunenburg/Queens Counties
- Collaboration with schools and the South Shore Regional School Board to incorporate healthy relationships activities, resources and curriculum into the schools; engage ‘parents as partners’ with schools via Parent Cafes; host a large scale Youth Forum focused on healthy relationships in 2014; engage boys in exploring their male identities in healthy, non-violent ways; promote media literacy and critical thinking for both boys and girls.
- Collaboration among justice, police and community organizations to explore how to make involvement with the protection/justice system more responsive and less traumatizing for victims; more of a focus on keeping victims safe, holding offenders accountable, and providing services to support both victims and offenders.

- *Gather the People* – group conversations between men and women to understand and alter the stereotypes that separate and disservice us all.

The passionate people who have joined in this initiative are concerned citizens, members of community groups, government agencies, schools, faith ministries, legal institutions, law enforcement agencies, municipal councils, women's advocacy groups, health service providers, and those who work every day to serve, support and help those affected by violence. The project is guided by the belief that our work together can make a difference.

### **The Benefits of Becoming a Partner**

Be the Peace Coordinators are happy to meet with you and explore how we can work together and what tools we can bring to support your current efforts to raise awareness about the issues.

We can coordinate:

1. Workshops/Training
  - for HR Personnel or Managers on supporting employees who may be in abusive relationships (either as victim or offender)
  - on how to spot the signs/clues of victimization in relationships
2. Assistance with the development of protocols to deal with disclosures and/or reports of violence in the workplace, in homes, or in the community
3. Presentations
  - *Neighbours, Friends and Families* - specifically for the workplace, this presentation provides an overview of relationship violence and how one can safely intervene if there is suspicion (or knowledge) of a violent relationship; in partnership with the RCMP
4. Resources and Referrals
  - To various community organizations, health services, police (for protection), support, counselling, men's intervention programs, accompaniment to court, emergency planning etc., so employees can get the help they need.
5. Information about strategies to become a "compassionate company" aligned with the global Charter of Compassion.

### **How You and Your Company Can Help**

1. Become a partner in Be the Peace by inviting us into your workplace to talk about relationship violence and how to address, reduce and end it, and by getting people the resources/help they need.
2. Become actively involved in one or more of our working group initiatives.
3. Help us establish a *Youth Initiatives Fund* through Second Story Women's Centre\* with donations from local businesses and corporate sponsorship, earmarked for youth initiatives, programs, and events on healthy relationship building and violence prevention, including:
  - *Healthy Relationships for Youth* curriculum for Grade 9 students - expansion into more schools and more grades
  - Programming for boys - in masculinity without aggression, literacy in emotional and sexual relationships, understanding consent, media literacy and male stereotypes
  - Programming for girls- Girl Talk, Striking Balance

- “Bring in the Bystander” training program
- Youth Forum 2014- a 2-day event for Grade 8-12 students on the South Shore, culminating in service projects in their schools with mentorship from supportive adults

\*Second Story Women’s Centre would be happy to supply a tax receipt for your contribution

4. Consider financial support for violence awareness initiatives, e.g. One Billion Rising for Justice, March 2014.

## **Conclusion**

An investment in reducing violence against women and girls is a sound investment. In the end it would allow us to build more peaceful, prosperous, vibrant and innovative communities in which all women and men, girls and boys feel safe and supported in being their best and most productive selves.

***"There are times when it takes an entire community to make a change.  
This is one of those times. We cannot do it without you."***

## **Contact us:**

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## **For more on Be the Peace:**

Web site: [www.bethepeace.ca](http://www.bethepeace.ca)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bethepeacemakeachange>  
Twitter: @BethePeace1  
1<sup>st</sup> Public Forum: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdoaihngVwM>  
2<sup>nd</sup> Public Forum: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5NM7RRJXtA>

## **References**

- 1 *Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, November 2012.*
- 2 *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-partner Sexual Violence. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2013.*
- 3 *The New Brunswick Beacon, January 28, 2013.*
- 4 *Sinha, Maire. Measuring Violence against Women: Statistical Trends, 2011. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2013.*
- 5 *Perreault, Samuel and Shannon Brennan. “Criminal Victimization in Canada: 2009.” Juristat. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011.*
- 6 *Sexual Assault in Nova Scotia: A Statistical Survey, 2009.*
- 7 *The Gap in the Gender Gap, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2013.*