

2022

# Strengthening Response to Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault on the North Shore

**REPORT BY:**

THE NORTH SHORE COORDINATING COMMITTEE TO END  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN RELATIONSHIPS (NS VAWIR)

## Land Acknowledgement

The North Shore VAWIR Committee would like to acknowledge that the work we do, including the planning and implementation of this project, takes place on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh First Nations. In recognition of the legacy of colonization, and the continued high levels of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, the North Shore VAWIR Committee commits to working toward decolonizing our actions and collaborating with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to learn, unlearn and create meaningful change. This land is sacred, and we express our utmost gratitude.



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## **North Shore Coordinating Committee to End Violence Against Women in Relationships**

The North Shore Coordinating Committee to End Violence Against Women in Relationships (NS VAWIR) has been hosted by the North Shore Women's Centre for over twenty years. Comprised of more than twenty different agencies across the North Shore, NS VAWIR creates a forum for service providers and representatives from the many sectors involved in preventing and responding to violence against women on the North Shore. The purpose is to provide an integrated response to ending relationship violence on the North Shore in the areas of service delivery, education and systemic response. For more information, please visit [www.northshorevawir.com](http://www.northshorevawir.com).

### **Acknowledgements**

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This report was created by Lulu Li, Tania Bakas, Nellie Dorchester, and Golnaz Yazdi with support from the Strengthening Responses sub-committee of the North Shore VAWIR Committee: Connie Bonsteel, Patti Custance, Michelle Dodds, and Kathy McLellan.



## Executive Summary

Gender-based violence is well documented as a major social problem throughout Canada; the most common forms being domestic violence and sexual assault.<sup>1</sup> Numerous agencies on the North Shore of Greater Vancouver work with women and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced or are currently experiencing violence. However, the available data is limited, as it only encompasses reports made to police and specific social service agencies who have been mandated to report disclosures. Individuals who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault may be disclosing elsewhere in the community where this information is not always collected. Additionally, the types of information reported can vary across agencies, thereby impacting levels of consistency. These factors pose limitations in capturing the full scope and nature of violence against women and gender-diverse individuals on the North Shore and, therefore, in responding effectively. The North Shore VAWIR Committee sought to strengthen the community's response to violence against women and gender diverse individuals by:

- Conducting a literature review focused on the incidence, nature and impacts of domestic violence and sexual assault elsewhere in British Columbia and across Canada.
- Developing a consistent data-gathering survey tool for use by a wide range of North Shore service providers and organizations.
- Inviting both mandated and non-traditional community agencies to engage in collecting brief, non-identifying information on disclosures of domestic violence and sexual assault to their organizations between October 21 - November 29, 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Justice Privacy and Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, "Domestic Violence - Province of British Columbia," accessed May 24, 2020, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/reporting-a-crime/what-is-a-crime/crime-examples/domestic-violence>.



- Engaging in discussion with service providers to gain qualitative information about the experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault by women and gender diverse individuals.
- Increasing awareness of and communication and dialogue about domestic violence and sexual assault among service providers and the broader community, as well as drawing attention to the needs of marginalized women.
- Analyzing the collected quantitative and qualitative data, which drew the following results:
  - Including both traditional and non-traditional service providers in data collection on domestic violence and sexual assault provides rich information that could otherwise be missed.
  - The vast majority (87%) of survivors whose experiences were documented disclosed experiences of domestic violence or sexual assault perpetrated by someone close to them; the most common group being intimate partners, followed by family members, and next, acquaintances.
  - The majority of survivors (95%) identified as cisgender women (i.e., female sex assigned at birth agrees with their gender identity as women).
  - Transgender and non-binary individuals made up only 3% of all survivors.
  - The majority of survivors experienced violence perpetrated by men (83%).
  - Many survivors disclosed experiences of violence perpetrated through multiple types of relationships in their lives. However, the vast majority of survivors (70%) reported experiences of violence, through intimate partner relationships, perpetrated by men.
  - Among experiences of violence whereby men were the perpetrators, the relationship of “intimate partner” was vastly over-represented, whereas among women perpetrators, there was a close distribution between intimate partners and other family members as perpetrators.
  - Nearly half (43%) of all survivors reported experiences of multiple forms of violence.



- The majority of survivors (65%) reported experiences of psychological/emotional violence.
- The most commonly reported form(s) of violence were a combination of both psychological/emotional and physical. However, when looking at each type of violence independently, among the many combinations of violence, the majority of survivors (65%) experienced psychological/emotional violence.
- Many community members do not wish to report their experiences of violence to police.
- At the time of research in 2019, lack of forensic exams for sexual assault and designated support services on the North Shore created a barrier for survivors wishing to report assault and seek assistance.
- Proposing recommendations for an integrated community response moving forward.

## **Project Overview**

### **Project: Strengthening response to domestic violence and sexual assault on the North Shore**

This project was planned and implemented to address the limitations in capturing the full scope and nature of violence against women on the North Shore and the direct impact this has on women and gender diverse individuals in the community who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Community agencies were invited to engage in collecting brief, non-identifying information on disclosures of domestic violence and sexual assault to their organization between October 21 - November 29, 2019.

The NS VAWIR Committee's objective is to improve community-wide response to gender-based violence on the North Shore. The Strengthening Response Project



supported this objective by addressing under-reporting, increasing awareness, communication and dialogue among service providers and the broader community, and drawing attention to the needs of marginalized women. Additionally, it allowed the Committee to begin developing a data-gathering survey tool that can be used across the community for ongoing collection of data on domestic violence and sexual assault. This report provides a snapshot of domestic violence and sexual assault on the North Shore based on results from the data-gathering survey and some qualitative information shared, and proposes future directions for an integrated community response.

### **Using common terminology for types of violence**

For the purpose of our survey, we used the term *domestic violence* as it is a widely recognizable umbrella term used to describe an on-going pattern of violence and control within a relationship. By definition, domestic violence occurs between people living together in a household, including intimate partners (legally married or common law), family members or roommates. It can occur between individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations, such as cisgender, heterosexual relationships, and relationships involving LGBTQ2SIA+ and gender-diverse individuals. It can involve one or multiple forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, financial, or psychological abuse, and any form of threatening behaviour. In our literature review, *intimate partner violence* was the term most commonly used, as can be seen in the following section. It typically refers to violence that occurs in the context of a romantic partner relationship - married, common law or dating - regardless of whether or not the parties involved are living together. While recognizing the differences between these terms, in this report, *domestic violence* will include intimate partner violence even when the parties in the relationship are not living together such as may be the case with former intimate partners or those who are dating. The term *sexual assault* is defined as non-consensual sexual contact that can range from touching to forced intercourse. Sexual assault may be perpetrated by anyone, including strangers, acquaintances, or





friends.<sup>2</sup> In this report, when sexual assault occurs in the context of an intimate partner relationship, we account for it as a form of domestic violence.

## **Statistics and literature on domestic violence and sexual assault: Relationship to under-reporting**

### **Who is at risk?**

In Canada, women are twice as likely as men to experience violence in the home and make up 79% of victims of intimate partner violence.<sup>3</sup> Intimate partner violence remains the most common form of violence experienced by women.<sup>4</sup> Just over 1 in 4 Canadian women have been assaulted by a spouse or partner.<sup>5</sup> While physical and sexual violence in non-spousal and non-domestic dating relationships has been explored less than in spousal and domestic dating relationships, the prevalence has been found to be similar<sup>4</sup>. The severity of violence also disproportionately affects women, who made up 72% of all victims of spousal homicide and dating homicides between 2001 to 2011.<sup>6</sup> Women experiencing intimate partner violence were more likely to experience strangulation or beating, sexual violence, and assault or threats involving a weapon. They were 11 times more likely than men to be the victim of sexual offences, and 3 times more likely to be the victim of criminal harassment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Province of British Columbia, "Sexual Assault: What Is It?," INSPQ, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.inspa.gc.ca/en/sexual-assault/understanding/what-is-it>.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2013," Juristat, no. 85 (2015): 85, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14114-eng.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Marta Burczycka, Shana Conroy, and Laura Savage, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2017," Juristat, no. 85 (2017): 55, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54978-eng.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation. (August 2016). Fact Sheet: Moving Women out of Violence. [https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FactSheet-VAWandDV\\_Feb\\_2018-Update.pdf](https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FactSheet-VAWandDV_Feb_2018-Update.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Sinha, E. M., & Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Eds.). (2013). Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends. Juristat, 85, 120. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf?st=zPQ8JkBO>



In 2011, the five most common violent offences committed against women were:

- Assault (49%)
- Uttering threats (13%)
- Serious assault (10%)
- Sexual assault - Level I (7%)

The most common perpetrator in this 2011 police-reported data was the woman's intimate partner (either a spouse or dating partner), making up almost half of those accused of violence against women. To a lesser degree, 27% of those accused were acquaintances or friends, 16% were strangers, and 12% were non-spousal family members.<sup>6</sup> With regards to sexual assault, a common misperception is that it is most frequently perpetrated by strangers. However, the reality is that in about 80% of cases, sexual assault is perpetrated by people who are known to survivors, such as an acquaintance, family member, or an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Indigenous women*

Indigenous women, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Indigenous women<sup>8</sup> and are 6 times more likely to be killed than non-Indigenous women.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous women are more likely to experience more severe forms of violence and suffer serious injuries as a result.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to facing vulnerabilities as women, Indigenous women and girls face significant harm as a result of racism and the ongoing impacts of colonialism.<sup>10</sup> The major social issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Women's Foundation. (2021). The facts about sexual assault and harassment. <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/sexual-assault-harassment/>

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, H., & Colpitts, E. (2013). *Violence Against Women in Canada* [Fact Sheet]. Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. [https://www.criaw-icref.ca/images/userfiles/files/VAW\\_ENG\\_longFinal.pdf](https://www.criaw-icref.ca/images/userfiles/files/VAW_ENG_longFinal.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. (2015). Homicide in Canada, 2014. The Daily.

<sup>10</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Canada), Buller, M., Audette, M., Eyolfson, B., & Robinson, Q. (2019). Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>



people (MMIWG) has been pinpointed as an additional and unique layer of violence that the National Inquiry into MMIWG called a genocide:

The violence the National Inquiry heard amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures evidenced notably by the *Indian Act*, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations. (pg 50)<sup>9</sup>

#### *Younger women*

Women aged 15-24 have higher rates of violent victimization than their older counterparts, according to both police-reported and self-reported data. The rates of violence against women in this age group are 42% higher than women ages 25 to 34, and almost 2 times higher than women ages 35 to 44.<sup>5</sup> They are the most likely to experience spousal violence and homicide compared to women in other age groups,<sup>11</sup> and they also face significantly higher rates of sexual assault.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Women with disabilities*

Women living with disabilities experience 2-3 times the levels of violence that able-bodied and neurotypical women do.<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that 60% of women with a disability have experienced some form of violence.<sup>13</sup> It is important to consider that social stereotypes around disabilities paired with physical and cultural barriers often reduce agency and increase vulnerability to violence.<sup>13</sup> Perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities can include people like family members, personal attendants, healthcare providers, intimate partners, and strangers. While this includes many of the

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<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2013. Juristat.

<sup>12</sup> Odette, F. and Rajan, D. (November 2013). Violence Against Women with DisAbilities and Deaf Women: An Overview. Learning Network Brief (12). London, Ontario: Learning Network, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

<sup>13</sup> Disabled Women's Network of Canada. (2014). Factsheet: Women with Disabilities and Violence. <https://dawnCanada.net/main/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/English-Violence-January-2014.pdf>



same forms of gender-based violence that able-bodied women experience, women with disabilities often face a wider range of many forms of violence, as well as additional barriers to safety.<sup>14</sup> Some examples include emotional abuse and control of wheelchairs, canes, respirators, and other assistive devices.<sup>13</sup> While they are more likely to experience intimate partner violence than women without disabilities, there is a common misperception that women with disabilities do not have intimate partners.<sup>14</sup> According to the Disability Alliance of British Columbia, this misperception contributes to the under-detection of intimate partner violence among this community.<sup>14</sup> A study by the Disability Alliance of BC reported that male partners of women with disabilities were significantly more likely to “behave in a patriarchal dominating manner...and engage in sexually proprietary behaviours” than male partners of women without disabilities (pp.7).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, women with disabilities are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience sexual assault than women without disabilities.<sup>6 13</sup>

#### *Newcomer women*

While newcomer women largely experience the same forms of violence that Canadian-born women do, they face a number of additional risks and barriers. For example, they may be more likely to become economically dependent on an intimate partner, family and social support. Newcomers often lack access to the labour market due to factors like their credentials not being recognized. Other common examples include having language barriers, lacking knowledge about community resources available to them, or lacking access to community support for various reasons.<sup>15 16</sup> For newcomer women who live with trauma surrounding their experiences under

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<sup>14</sup> Disability Alliance BC. (2016). Right to be safe: creating inclusive services for women with disabilities experiencing violence. <https://disabilityalliancebc.org/rfbsguideupdate/>

<sup>15</sup> Bhuyan, R., Osborne, B., Zahraei, S., & Tarshis, S. (2014). Unprotected, Unrecognized Canadian Immigration Policy and Violence Against Women, 2008-2013 [Policy Brief]. <https://refugeereseach.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bhuyan-et-al-2014-Immigration-policy-and-VAW.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Tabibi, J., Ahmad, S., Baker, L., & Lalonde, D. (2018). Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women. Learning Network Issue 26. London, Ontario: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. ISBN # 978-1-988412-24-5



oppressive governments or war, the fear of deportation or further victimization are barriers to reporting violence and seeking help.<sup>5</sup>

#### *LGBTQ2SIA+ women*

In 2014, women who identified as lesbian or bisexual were 3-4 times more likely to report experiencing spousal violence than their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>17</sup> In addition to violence by strangers due to transphobia, trans women experience increased vulnerabilities in relationships that can include isolation from family and friends, inability to access housing or formal employment due to discrimination, and stigmatization in society.<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada has only begun to collect basic data on trans and non-binary folks, making it difficult to quantify the rates of violence experienced by trans women and non-binary folks in Canada. However, according to numbers from the United States, around half of transgender respondents have been sexually assaulted (with higher numbers amongst Black trans respondents), and more than half have experienced some form of intimate partner violence.<sup>19</sup> In a 2019 National Profile, only half of women's shelters and transition houses in Canada reported that they had served trans, gender fluid, or intersex individuals fleeing violence. Of those shelters and transition houses, only 57% indicated that they could always accommodate them.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Older Women*

Older women are more at risk of becoming victims of violence and domestic abuse compared to their male counterparts.<sup>21</sup> Women tend to live longer than men, and as they age they become more isolated and marginalized as a consequence of ageism and sexism. Therefore they are more vulnerable to fall victim to exploitation, abuse and

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<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. (2014). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2014. Juristat, 85, 77. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303-eng.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Greenberg, K. (2012). Still Hidden in the Closet: Trans Women and Domestic Violence. *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, 27(2). <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38J678W3D>

<sup>19</sup> National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE). (2016). 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey Report.

<sup>20</sup> Maki, K. (2019). "More Than a Bed: A National Profile of VAW Shelters and Transition Houses." Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada.

<sup>21</sup> Dawson, M.(2021). Research paper-Not the 'golden years':Femicide of older women in Canada . Office of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime. <https://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/FOV-FOV/index.html>



violence, which may even lead to death. Women who are older are more likely to brush off the physical and mental effects of abuse as a normal part of the aging process.<sup>22</sup>

## The effects of domestic violence

Effects of domestic violence are vast, serious and often long-term.

### *Physical impacts*

Police-reported data from 2011 indicates that about half of female victims of intimate partner violence suffered some type of physical injury.<sup>5</sup> Of all spousal homicides between 2007 and 2017, 60% had been preceded by a history of family violence, indicating that spousal homicide was a risk for those in ongoing violent relationships.<sup>19</sup>

### *Emotional and psychological impacts*

Perhaps deeper than physical injury are the lasting impacts on emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness. Many women will experience immense mental health struggles as a result of domestic violence, including the lasting impacts of trauma. Women who have experienced violent victimization report higher levels of fear, daily stress, depression and anxiety, and disruption to their daily life.<sup>23</sup> Victims of domestic violence use medication for depression, anxiety, and sleep troubles at higher rates than those who have not experienced violence.<sup>23</sup>

### *Intergenerational impacts*

Violence impacts the whole family and the impacts are often intergenerational. In 2009, 59% of female spousal victims with children reported that their children saw or heard assaults and 5% of female spousal victims reported that children were harmed during the violent episode.<sup>5</sup> Children who witness violence in the home are likely to be impacted throughout their development and lifetime; growing up in a violent

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<sup>22</sup> British Columbia Law Institute Publication. (2015). Promising Practices for Housing Women who are Older. <https://www.bcli.org/publication/promising-practices-for-housing-women-who-are-older/>



household is also one of the strongest predictors of children becoming either victims or perpetrators of violence later in life.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Broader impacts*

Broader impacts to consider are the costs associated with responding to spousal violence.<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that spousal violence alone costs Canadians billions of dollars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Examples include provincial level costs associated with healthcare and criminal justice response,<sup>22</sup> and individual costs such as income loss when unable to maintain everyday responsibilities and work.<sup>22</sup>

## **Barriers to escaping violence**

### *Shelter*

The vast majority of police-reported cases of intimate partner violence occur in a private dwelling (84%), most of which occur in a home shared by both the victim and the perpetrator.<sup>4</sup> This often means that in order to escape this form of violence, women must leave their homes. For many, this may mean accessing a shelter or transition house. A 2014 survey snapshot showed that there were 4,476 women and 3,493 dependent children staying in shelters across Canada. Of those, 78% were there primarily due to fleeing violence.<sup>24</sup> On the snapshot date, 338 women and 201 accompanying children were turned away from shelters across Canada due to a lack of resources.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, due to a shortage of resources, shelters, transition houses, and second stage housing serving women and families escaping violence can only facilitate stays for a limited period of time that can be too short for finding permanent housing – especially in British Columbia, which has an affordable housing market crisis.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zhang, T., Hoddenbagh, J., McDonald, S., & Scrim, K. (2009). An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada, 2009. Department of Justice Canada, 162. [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_7/rr12\\_7.pdf](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/rr12_7.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Beattie, S., & Hutchins, H. (n.d.). Shelters for abused women in Canada, 2014. Juristat, 85, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Maki, K. (2019). "More Than a Bed: A National Profile of VAW Shelters and Transition Houses." Ottawa, ON: Women's Shelters Canada.



For reference, the average housing prices for the City of North Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver, and the District of West Vancouver are listed below.

Unit Size	City of North Vancouver	District of North Vancouver	District of West Vancouver
Bachelor	\$1,242	\$1,281	\$1,330
1 BDR	\$1,444	\$1,589	\$1,713
2 BDR	\$1,762	\$2,112	\$2,634
3 BDR +	\$2,972	\$2,455	\$3,604

Average Rent (\$): Row & Apartment by Bedroom Type on the North Shore – October 2020

Source: [CMHC Rental Market Survey- Vancouver- Rental Market Statistics Summary by Zone](#)

*Language and cultural safety*

Many women face additional barriers to accessing shelter. For example, as mentioned prior, newcomer women may face language barriers or may lack knowledge of the available services. Services may not be culturally safe for newcomer women<sup>14</sup> or Indigenous women. While 80% of shelters and transition houses in Canada reported serving Indigenous women, only 19% were confident that they were usually able to offer culturally appropriate services and only 17% reported that providing culturally appropriate supports and services was “not an issue”.<sup>18</sup>

*Accessibility*

Many women with disabilities experience greater difficulty in leaving their abuser(s) due to a number of additional barriers.<sup>12</sup> These barriers can vary depending on the type(s) of disability. For example, the Disability Alliance of British Columbia writes that there can be:

...difficulty in making contact with shelters or other intervention services, lack of access to information about available services, difficulties in accessing transportation, fear of losing their financial security, their housing or their welfare benefits and fear of being institutionalized. (pp.7)





Often, the abuser of a woman with disabilities is her primary caregiver and may control transportation and communication.<sup>12</sup> Should a woman manage to leave, not all services are accessible for women with disabilities. Between 2017 and 2018, less than half (47%) of shelters and transition houses in Canada reported that all shelter services were “generally accessible” for women who use mobility devices, with 26% reporting they were “somewhat” accessible and 26% reporting that they were “difficult to access”.<sup>17</sup> In another study, only one in 10 women with disabilities received the support needed from a women’s shelter or transition house, and the primary reason for this was lack of accessibility.<sup>11</sup> Less than a quarter of shelters in Canada had additional accessibility measures, such as specially equipped phones, sign language or interpretation services, and large print or Braille materials.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Zero tolerance policies*

While many shelters and transition houses have moved towards creating lower access barriers, many continue to have zero tolerance policies for drug and alcohol use, which can be a barrier for women with complex needs. Of the shelters and transition houses across Canada, the majority had served women with complex mental health and substance use concerns.<sup>18</sup> 79% of those reported that this was a “major challenge” for their shelter, as they lacked adequate resources.<sup>18</sup>

### **Leaving violence: Increased risk**

For women who do leave domestic violence, they face a statistically increased risk of being killed by their abuser after they leave.<sup>5</sup> Often an abusive partner will threaten to kill themselves or the woman if she leaves, or they may threaten to hurt or kill children or pets.<sup>26</sup> One study found that over a quarter of victims of spousal homicide were killed after they had already left, and half of women who were killed by their partner were

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<sup>26</sup> Horrill, K. E., & Berman, H. (2004). Getting Out and Staying Out: Issues Surrounding a Woman’s Ability to Remain Out of an Abusive Relationship. Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children. [http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/our-work/pdfs/Final-GettingOutandStayingOutIssuesSurroundingaWomansAbilitytoRemainOutofanAbusiveRelati\\_000.pdf](http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/our-work/pdfs/Final-GettingOutandStayingOutIssuesSurroundingaWomansAbilitytoRemainOutofanAbusiveRelati_000.pdf)



killed within two months of leaving the relationship.<sup>25</sup> In fact, women are 6 times more likely to be killed by an ex-partner than a current one.<sup>27</sup> This trend extends to dating violence, as the majority of women who were abused by a partner report that violence escalated after the breakup.<sup>26</sup>

## **Under-reporting: Numbers and barriers**

Many of the statistics documenting intimate partner violence and sexual assault are believed to be underestimations due to low rates of reporting. Sexual assaults are considered the most underreported crime.<sup>28</sup> According to the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization, 83% of victims did not disclose their sexual assault incidents to the police,<sup>29</sup> while the 2009 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization indicates that only 30% of female victims reported the incident of spousal victimization to police.<sup>5</sup> Only one in 20 (or around 5%) of sexual assault incidents perpetrated by someone other than a spouse was reported to the police.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as few as 1% of victims of sexual violence in dating relationships reported their experiences<sup>31</sup> and only around 6% of female victims who suffered serious incidents of unwanted behaviour online reported violence to police.<sup>32</sup> A 2018 West Coast LEAF report looked at the reasons that survivors of sexual assault decided not to report. They were grouped into several themes:<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Statistics Canada. (2016). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2014. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/160121/dq160121b-eng.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Prochuk, A. (2018). We are here: Women's experiences of the barriers of reporting sexual assault. West Coast LEAF.

<sup>29</sup> Perreault, S. 2015. Criminal victimization in Canada, 2014. Juristat Statistics Canada Catalogue 85-002-X

<sup>30</sup> Conroy, S., & Cotter, A. (2014). Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014. Juristat, 85, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Canada. (2014). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2014. Juristat, 85, 77. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303-eng.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Cotter, A., & Savage, L. (2019). Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. 85, 49.



### *Socio-cultural attitudes*

Attitudes toward sexual violence tend to blame victims and minimize the seriousness of the assault. Survivors can internalize these attitudes, resulting in self-blame, or hesitation to label what happened to them as violence worthy of reporting. Survivors may also fear that the response to their disclosure would be unsupportive. Some survivors may believe that what happened to them was common and expected and they should not be emotionally affected.

### *Survivors' beliefs and values about the justice system*

Many of the respondents had unsatisfactory experiences with the justice system or knew of other cases that had unsatisfactory results, leading them to believe that they would not receive justice if they reported.

### *Conduct of individuals*

Women noted that one of the most significant barriers to reporting was treatment by individuals within the system, such as police officers, lawyers, or judges.

### *Personal repercussions*

Participants also feared retaliation by the perpetrator, loss of privacy, and impacts on security and employment.

### *Concerns about the criminal justice system process*

Many of the participants were concerned that the process from police involvement to trial may be retraumatizing, would have significant psychological impacts, and that their case may not be legally viable.

The reasons for not reporting intimate partner violence are very similar. According to Statistics Canada,<sup>5</sup> the most common reasons women decided to not report were:

- The victim handled the incident without police involvement
- The victim perceived the crime as minor and not worth taking the time to report
- The incident was considered a private or personal matter



- The victim did not want to get involved with police
- The victim did not want anyone to find out
- The victim did not want their spouse to get arrested
- The victim thought police could not do anything
- The victim feared their spouse
- The victim had no confidence in the criminal justice system
- The victim feared publicity
- The victim thought police would not help

As seen above, common themes in the reasons for not involving police included mistrust of police and the criminal justice system, believing they would not be taken seriously by the police and the criminal justice system, or not wanting their spouse to get arrested. Many women may rely on their spouse economically and in other ways. For example, for women with disabilities, their partner may also be their primary caregiver.<sup>12</sup> One woman of colour in West Coast LEAF's report<sup>27</sup> spoke about her fears that both she and her perpetrator would face racism within the system if she reported the sexual assault; she did not see the justice in his incarceration, knowing there was racial bias present. As such, many victims may have a particularly strong mistrust of police and the criminal justice system. Studies show that when racialized women report violence, they are not taken as seriously by the criminal justice system.<sup>33</sup> A number of marginalized groups, including trans women, racialized women, and Indigenous women, may have already had negative experiences with law enforcement, such as being harassed by police, and do not see involving police as a safe option for them.<sup>27</sup> Women who do sex work additionally fear being blamed for violence against them due to their profession.<sup>27</sup> Women belonging to smaller communities such as the LGBTQ2SIA+ community, may not report out of fear that they may be alienated from their communities or that they will give their community a bad name.

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<sup>33</sup> Ruparelia, R. (2012). All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The False Promise of Victim Impact Statements. In *Sexual Assault in Canada: Law, legal practice, and women's activism* (pp. 665–700).



Along with potential language barriers, newcomer women who have come from countries of war, political instability, or oppressive governments may mistrust authority figures and may fear that reporting would impact their status in Canada or the status of their partner or family members.<sup>13</sup> This fear is elevated if their immigration status relies on their perpetrator, for example if they are sponsoring them.<sup>14</sup> Other frequently reported reasons for not reporting sexual abuse were that victims thought they might not be believed, they were unaware that they could report their experience, they felt ashamed, or they had no other supports. Many who experienced spousal abuse reported that they saw the abuse as a private matter and hence did not report to police.<sup>28</sup> This may be particularly true for women with immigrant or refugee backgrounds who may hold collectivist cultural beliefs around keeping the family together and not reporting what they see as a private matter.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, women often rely on support other than the criminal justice system for assistance following a victimization experience. As high as 80% of women who were victimized by their spouse told family, friends or another source of informal support about the incident instead of reporting to police.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

Violence against women is a rampant societal problem, with groups such as Indigenous women, women with disabilities, those belonging to the LGBTQ2SIA+ community, and newcomer women experiencing additional barriers. Despite the significant impacts on women, their families, and the broader community, sexual violence and intimate partner violence are largely under-reported for a number of reasons. Many women have mistrust of the police and the criminal justice system and find other informal ways of obtaining support following violence. Furthermore, many survivors internalize cultural views that blame the victim, minimize the impacts of violence, and/or view intimate partner violence as a private or personal matter. The literature also suggests that there



are a number of barriers that women face when trying to leave a violent home, including accessibility and cultural safety in transition houses and shelter, difficulties accessing safe long-term housing, and increased risk of elevated violence and even death after leaving a relationship. While women living at different intersections of marginalization may face their own unique barriers, violence against women is a serious and ongoing global concern.

## **The Survey**

The Strengthening Response Project survey gathered statistical information for disclosures of domestic violence or sexual assault made to participating North Shore Community agencies between October 21st, 2019 and November 29th, 2019. In the administration of the survey, participating organizations were provided with a comprehensive instruction guide which included examples of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. The survey form included four checkbox survey questions, asking for information on survivor and perpetrator gender, form of violence, and relationship between survivor and perpetrator. Information gathered was anonymous and non-identifying, and service providers filling out the survey were asked to only include information that was offered voluntarily and unprompted by survivors, unless asking these questions was part of the providers' service protocol.

## **Recruitment for participant community agencies**

Local community agencies were recruited to participate via email and phone calls. Approximately 90 community-based service providers and high school counsellors in 15 high schools on the North Shore were contacted. 29 organizations volunteered to participate in the statistical gathering project. At the conclusion of the 6-week collection period, 14 agencies had submitted responses. It is pertinent to note that the absence of participation from the 15 remaining agencies that had volunteered to be a part of the survey does not signal a withdrawal from participation but rather an indication that there were no disclosures of violence during the 6-week survey period.



## Education for participating agencies

As this survey was part of a larger project mandate to include education to front-line service providers on the impacts of violence against women in relationships, the survey dissemination, promotion and execution was designed so that the process of recruitment and active participation would also provide agencies with useful and relevant information for their work with survivors. This was accomplished in the following ways:

### *The participation guide*

In preparation for participation in the 6-week survey, a comprehensive informational guide was provided to agencies to help them understand the details of participation, commitment required and the premise for collecting the data. A detailed explanation of terms used for gender, forms of violence and types of relationships was provided to ensure participants were completing the survey with a unified terminology and understanding. Promoting the use of a common "language" for communicating issues on gender-based violence opens a path for efficient and effective collaboration, referral processes and overall response to gender-based violence (GBV) within the community.

### *Follow-up calls to confirm participation*

The recruitment process included following up with agencies by phone offering an opportunity to connect one-on-one with decision makers and discuss the project, the ongoing work of the NS VAWIR Committee, and an opportunity to understand the unique needs and challenges agencies may or may not be facing when responding to GBV.

### *Weekly reminder emails*

During the six weeks of data collection, weekly reminders were sent to agencies to continue to report any disclosures of domestic violence or sexual assault. The reminder emails included short educational paragraphs and useful links with information on GBV.



## Key findings from the survey

- Including traditional and non-traditional service providers in data collection on domestic violence and sexual assault provides rich information that would otherwise be missed.
- The vast majority (87%) of survivors disclosed experiences of domestic violence or sexual assault perpetrated by someone close to them, the most common being intimate partners, followed by family members, and next acquaintances.
- The majority of the survivors (95%) were cisgender women.
- Transgender and non-binary folks made up only 3% of all survivors.
- The majority of the survivors experienced violence perpetrated by men (83%).
- Many survivors disclosed experiences of violence perpetrated through multiple types of relationships in their lives. However, the vast majority of survivors (70%) reported experiences of violence through a single type of relationship perpetrated by men.
- Among experiences of violence whereby men were the perpetrators, intimate partners were vastly over-represented, whereas among women perpetrators, there was a close distribution between intimate partners and other family members.
- Nearly half (43%) of all survivors reported experiences of multiple forms of violence.
- The most commonly reported form(s) of violence were a combination of both psychological/emotional and physical. However, when looking at each type of violence independently, among the many combinations of violence, the majority of survivors (65%) experienced psychological/emotional violence.
- Many community members do not wish to report to police, so community-based alternatives are necessary.
- There is a lack of specialized sexual assault services on the North Shore, which causes a barrier for survivors.





## Discussion

The analysis of data collected in our survey is centered around details of survivors' experiences of violence that they chose to share with a traditional or non-traditional service provider in the community. Therefore, the service providers' responses do not necessarily encompass the entirety of the survivors' experiences, and instead components that they sought support for. Such disclosures do not necessarily indicate a single incident of violence, but rather any experiences of violence occurring in the past or present, for any duration of time. For example, some may have reported their experience of a sexual assault that occurred in the past, while others may be discussing current and ongoing multi-dimensional abuse through intimate partner violence. Some reported on experiences of violence perpetrated by various people throughout their lives, and others reported on experiences of violence perpetrated by a single person. While conclusions cannot be drawn based on which perpetrator used which type of violence, what can be explored is the commonalities in survivors' experiences.

Additionally, while cisgender men can and do experience violence, gender-based violence is a major social issue, with women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing disproportionately higher levels of violence as compared to men. Most commonly, men are the perpetrators and women are the survivors. Seeking to address this social issue, this survey focuses on experiences of survivors identifying as cisgender women, transgender, gender variant or gender non-binary, and Two-Spirit. While reports could have been made about men disclosing experiences of violence, many participating community agencies do not work with men. Therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn from the lack of survivors identifying as cisgender men. Moving forward for the purposes of this data analysis, women and cisgender women will be used interchangeably, as will men and cisgender men.



Lastly, in the survey, respondents were provided options for the type(s) of relationship(s) that applied: current intimate partner, former intimate partner, other family member, acquaintance, stranger, or unknown. However, in this data analysis, we chose to look at current intimate partner and former intimate partner as one type of relationship, to avoid ambiguity. This was decided because there may have been inconsistency in respondents' selection based on their own interpretation. For instance, while we were interested in the type of relationship at the time of the violence, respondents may have responded based on the current status of the survivors' relationship. Specifically, they may have selected "former intimate partner" when at the time of the violence, the perpetrator was a current intimate partner.

## **Reports Made**

During the 6 weeks of data collection, community organizations participating in this project reported on a total of 316 disclosures of violence. Specific organizations will not be named and identifying information will be left out to protect confidentiality. The results of this survey demonstrate the importance of including both traditional and non-traditional services providers in data collection, as this can provide rich information that would otherwise be lacking and even mis-represented. For instance, 2 reports were made to church ministers; 1 to a librarian; 1 to a peer support worker; and 1 to a career advisor. 112 disclosures were made to advocates, 81 were made to counsellors, and 62 were made to workers conducting intake, crisis support, or victim services. 14 were made to workers in the context of providing resources, support, and program coordination, and 22 were made to workers providing family support. 10 were made to workers supporting newcomer women through settlement services or outreach, and 10 were made to workers supporting women with housing.

Not only does this information allow for an understanding of where survivors are reporting, but it also enables the community response to adapt accordingly. As described above, survivors are choosing to disclose to non-traditional service providers.

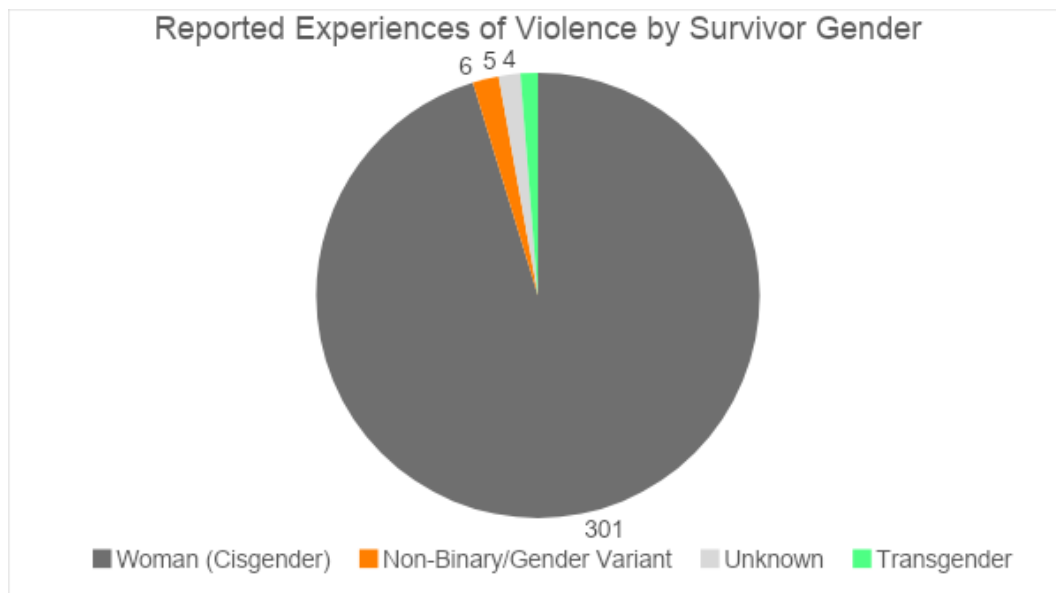


Therefore, this indicates that non-traditional service providers could benefit from education and supports around understanding the complexities of domestic violence and sexual assault and learning how to respond to disclosures of such past or ongoing experiences.

## Gender

### *Gender of survivors*

The vast majority of survivors were women, with 95% identifying as cisgender women and 3% identifying as non-binary, gender variant or transgender. 2% of survivors' genders were reported as unknown.



Graph 1: Reported Experiences of Violence by Survivor Gender

### *Gender of perpetrators*

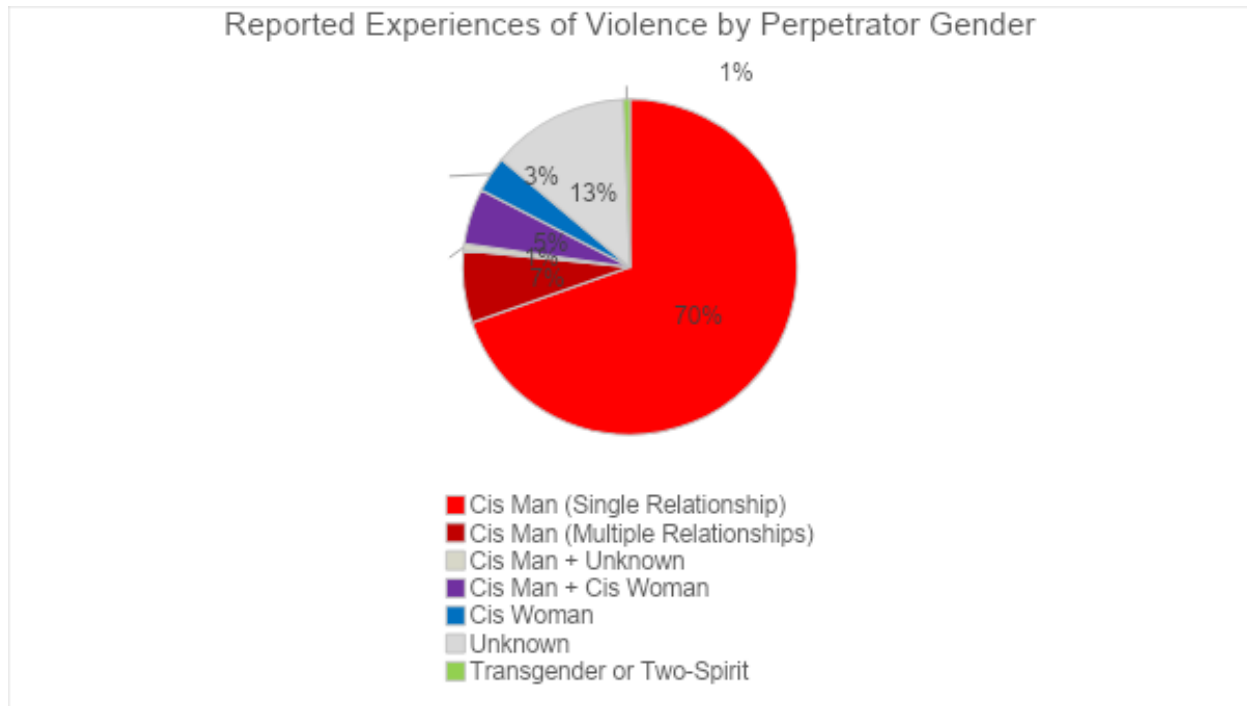
83% of all survivors disclosed experiences of violence perpetrated by men. 93% of these experiences involved men alone, with 7% involving both cisgender men and women, and 0.1% involving both cisgender men and unknown perpetrator gender(s).

Perpetrator genders were reported as unknown when the respondent did not know the



gender of one or all of the survivor's perpetrators. 14% of reports listed unknown as the sole perpetrator gender.

9% of survivors experienced violence perpetrated by women, with 61% of these experiences involving both women and men, and 39% involving women alone. Only 1% of survivors experienced violence by transgender and two-spirit perpetrators, therefore conclusions cannot be drawn based on these genders.



Graph 2: Reported Experiences of Violence by Perpetrator Gender

### Relationship to Perpetrator(s)

87% of survivors reported experiences of violence perpetrated by at least one person they knew. This is counter to the idea that women and gender-diverse individuals are most vulnerable to violence perpetrated by strangers. However, looking at each type of relationship separately, 72% of survivors experienced violence perpetrated by (a)



current or former intimate partner(s), 19% by other family members, 9% by acquaintances, 3% by strangers, and 12% by unknown relationship types. These percentages total more than 100%, as many survivors (13%) disclosed violence within more than one type of relationship. Among these survivors with multiple disclosed perpetrators, the relationships were most commonly both intimate partners and other family members.

### Experiences of violence with men as perpetrators

As seen in graph 2, 70 % of survivors experienced violence perpetrated by men from a single type of relationship, making up the largest group of perpetrators. Graph 3 further demonstrates the types of relationships reported in this group, the vast majority being a current or former intimate partner, and the next largest group being another family member, followed by an acquaintance, then a stranger, and finally, relationships that were recorded as unknown. Looking at the number of survivors who reported violence perpetrated by men from several types of relationships, the very same pattern is observed. Interestingly, “strangers” were only selected among survivors who experienced violence perpetrated by men alone. This being said, it is possible that “unknown” was selected in place of strangers.



## Experiences of violence with women as perpetrators

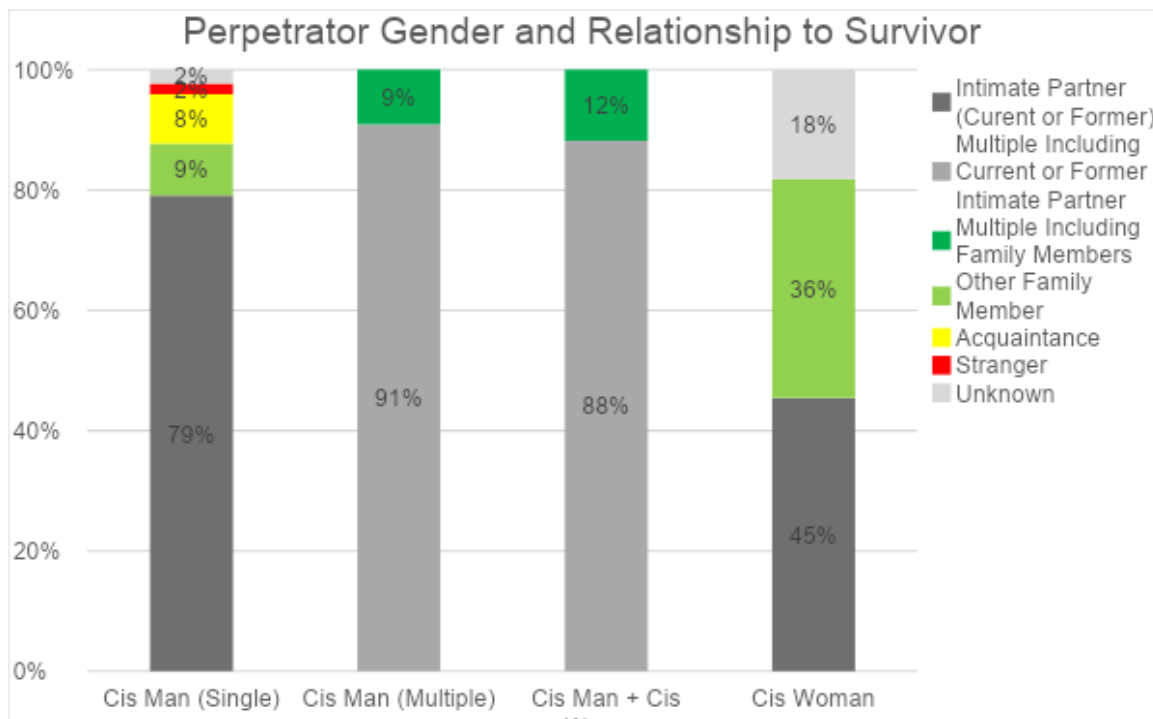
In contrast, this pattern was different for survivors who reported experiencing violence perpetrated by women alone. Amongst these survivors, there was only a single person difference between intimate partners and family members (as seen in graph 4).



Graph 4: Reported Experiences of Violence by Single Relationship Type, among Cisgender Women Perpetrators

Graph 5 shows a comparison between the groups discussed, as well as the mixed men and women perpetrator group. Only 3 survivors who experienced violence perpetrated by both women and men, reported acquaintances as perpetrators, and these are included in the "multiple including..." groups.





Graph 5: Perpetrator Gender and Relationship to Survivor.

Overall, it can be seen that when survivors experienced violence perpetrated by men, the vast majority were intimate partners. Strangers, acquaintances, and other family members were reported, but to a much smaller extent comparatively. In contrast, when women were involved as perpetrators, the proportion of family members to intimate partners was closer. Few acquaintances and no strangers were reported. All in all, these findings show that it is significantly more common for violence against women on the North Shore to be perpetrated by someone close to the survivor, like an intimate partner, or a family member.

## Types of Violence

The majority of survivors (65%) reported experiences of psychological/emotional violence. Just under half (47%) reported experiences of physical violence, 24% reported experiences of sexual violence, and 15% of reports indicated “unknown” forms of



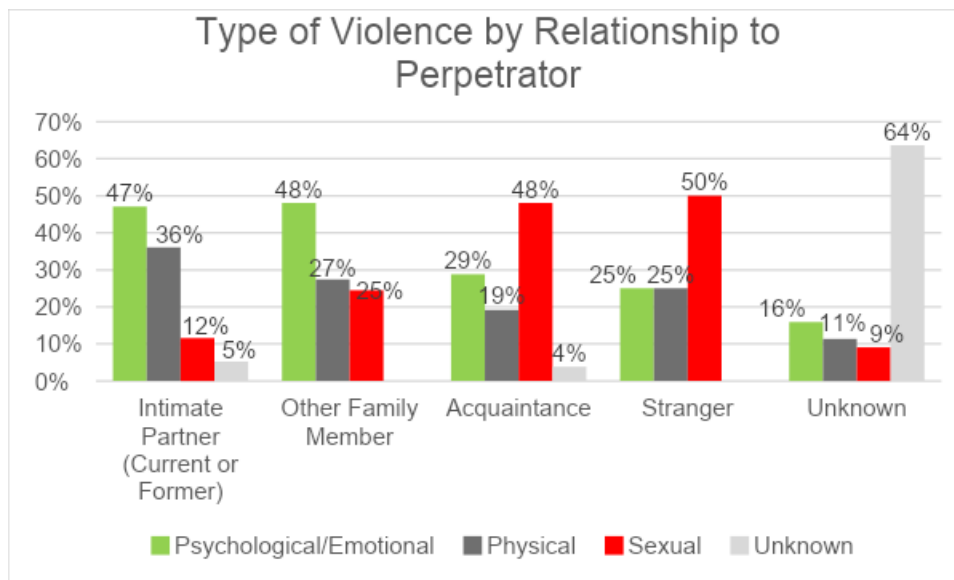
violence. 43% of survivors reported experiencing multiple forms of violence. The most common form of violence reported by survivors was a combination of physical and psychological/emotional violence (26%). This was followed by psychological/emotional violence alone (24%), and then physical violence alone (12%). However, as mentioned earlier, this data is reporting on aspects of experiences that survivors chose to share, therefore a survivor may have experienced multiple forms of violence but only chose to discuss one. 8% of survivors reported experiencing sexual violence alone. Analyzing types of violence according to gender of perpetrator, there are no striking differences.

#### *Types of Violence by Relationship to Perpetrator*

There are trends in the data whereby types of violence experienced by survivors vary according to the relationship(s) to their perpetrator(s). As seen (in graph 6), when intimate partners or family members were recorded as perpetrators, psychological/emotional violence was the most common type of violence disclosed. This was followed by physical violence. However, the proportion of sexual violence increases steadily among family members, acquaintances, and strangers. Due to the small number of strangers (9 reports), conclusions cannot be drawn from the ratio of types of violence. However, when acquaintances or strangers were recorded as perpetrators, sexual violence was the dominant form of violence. It is important to stress that this data does not necessarily mean that only 12% of survivors experienced sexual violence by an intimate partner. Rather, it indicates that this 12% chose to discuss these experiences. There can be many reasons for this, and while we cannot speculate, it is worth raising the common belief that sexual acts are automatically consensual when the perpetrator is one's partner. Survivors may not know that their experiences of coerced or forced sexual acts in their relationship were sexual violence, or may minimize their experiences. There can also be pain, shame and discomfort around discussing these experiences.







Graph 6

### Reports of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault to Crown

Following our analysis of violence disclosed to traditional and non-traditional service providers (not including police), it is important to also consider reports made to police. As seen in Table 5 and 6, there is a significant discrepancy between the percentage of reports to Crown submitted for charges in cases of domestic violence (53-74%) versus sexual assault (12-17%).

Time Period	Number of incidents	Reports to Crown submitted for charges	Percentage
January 1-November 30, 2019	238	127	54%
October 21-November 30, 2019	27	20	74%



Table 5: North Vancouver Police Reported Domestic Violence

Time Period	Number of incidents	Reports to Crown submitted for charges	Percentage
January 1-November 30, 2019	78	9	12%
October 21-November 30, 2019	6	1	17%

Table 6: North Vancouver Police Reported Sexual Assault

(These are sexual assaults of adults, not sexual offences involving children or other offences such as aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon or sexual assault causing bodily harm)

With the underreporting of both sexual assault and domestic violence, it is difficult to assess the reasons for this discrepancy. However, at present there are no sexual assault forensic exam kits available on the North Shore, with Vancouver General Hospital and UBC Hospital being the closest facilities to access treatment and a kit. This lack of specialized sexual assault services may act as a barrier for many survivors wishing to involve police. This was raised by service providers as a limitation in community response on the North Shore:

[The lack of access to forensic kits] causes some victims who do wish to consider police or justice involvement to not proceed. For some, there is not a support network to rely on to assist in this immediate crisis to hold their hand and help them take appropriate steps. A sexual assault centre for crisis support, examination, etc. would be an ideal option to reduce and/or eliminate barriers.



## Reports by LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals

While the vast majority of the survivors in the available data were cisgender women, 10 of the survivors were trans, non-binary, or gender variant. Estimates point to approximately 0.24% of the Canadian population identifying as transgender or non-binary,<sup>34</sup> while 3% of reports in the available data were trans, non-binary, or gender variant. The numbers are reflective of the overrepresentation of transgender and non-binary folks in incidents of violent victimization. Research shows that transgender and non-binary people are at a significantly higher risk of violent victimization, especially sexual assault, than their cisgender counterparts.<sup>33 35 36</sup> Of the survivors in our survey identifying as trans, non-binary or gender-variant, 7 out of 10 reported experiences of psychological/emotional violence, 3 reported experiences of physical violence, 3 reported experiences of sexual violence, and 1 selected "unknown" forms of violence. 7 out of 10 of these survivors experienced violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner; 1 out of 10 by another family member; 1 by an acquaintance, and 1 by a stranger. While the majority of the survivors in this survey had experienced violence from someone they knew, transgender and non-binary folks are significantly more likely than their cisgender counterparts to report violence or unwanted behaviours online, in public places, and/or at work.<sup>33</sup> LGBTQ2SIA+ folks are also less likely to report an assault.<sup>33</sup> Statistics Canada does not currently collect disaggregated data on transgender and non-binary folks and the numbers they collect around victimization are based on police-reported numbers. That means that even the numbers on hand may not be entirely accurate. While there is not enough data to

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<sup>34</sup> Jaffray, B. (2020). Experiences of violent victimization and unwanted sexual behaviours among gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people, and the transgender population, in Canada, 2018. Statistics Canada

<sup>35</sup> Griner, S. B., Vamos, C. A., Thompson, E. L., Logan, R., Vásquez-Otero, C. and E. M. Daley. 2017. "The intersection of gender identity and violence: Victimization experienced by transgender college students." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

<sup>36</sup> Stotzer, R. 2009. "Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data." *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. Vol. 14, no. 3. p. 170–179.



disaggregate the experiences of transgender and non-binary folks from the rest of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community, it also establishes that they face additional barriers to reporting and that they might not be connected to as many community resources for fear of discrimination.

## Looking forward: Recommendations and Conclusion

Through this project, we sought to address gaps in the current scope of data collection, to ultimately strengthen the response to domestic violence and sexual assault on the North Shore. We worked with community organizations to obtain consistent data on their reports of domestic violence and sexual assault. The concept of collective data sharing is rapidly evolving and gaining attention through organizations like HelpSeeker Technologies, who describe it as a digital revolution to create collective change.<sup>37</sup> While organizations often seek to improve their services through the funding they are able to obtain, working together through ongoing data sharing can enable a wider-scale approach to supporting women and gender-diverse individuals in the community through collective action.<sup>35</sup>

Based on the results of our survey and a broader literature review, we see a clear need for a cohesive community approach to gathering data about gender-based violence on the North Shore. To build community capacity for ending gender-based violence and to ensure that effective strategies are in place, it is integral that these are based on, and adapted according to, an accurate, and thorough understanding of the very issue that is being addressed.<sup>35</sup> Currently, the available data does not capture the full complexity of sexual assault and domestic violence, as there are significant gaps. While police-reported data and data from agencies who are mandated to report is essential in understanding the scope of gender-based violence, relying exclusively on these

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<sup>37</sup> Turner, A., McManus, C., Wells, L., Baker, L., Mah, J. (July 22, 2021). *Data2Action: Building community capacity for systems change using data*. HelpSeeker Technologies. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWZCoZ\\_DwFc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWZCoZ_DwFc)



sources is incomplete. Several service providers participating in our survey noted that their clients and other community members were not always willing to report domestic violence and sexual assault to police. The reality is that there are many places in the community where women are choosing to report, and these need to be considered and included in statistical data-gathering in order to gather a full picture. These can include social service providers working with women, but also non-traditional service providers, such as faith-based healers or local employers.

As the North Shore VAWIR Committee, we believe that ongoing shared data collection is integral moving forward in work and vision of ending violence against women on the North Shore and beyond. Capturing more fulsome data is not only about improving existing services for those who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault on the North Shore. It is also a more proactive approach as a means of determining effective prevention strategies.

## **Recommendations**

Through the results of our survey and the literature review, we provide the following recommendations to relevant stakeholders and our community as a whole:

1. **Consistent Data Gathering** - Consistent and collective data gathering on reports of domestic violence and sexual assault - using common and accessible data collection tools - is needed to provide a more holistic understanding of gender-based violence on the North Shore. This would involve expanding data collection to social service providers and non-traditional service providers through a centralized platform.
2. **Focus on Marginalized Communities of Survivors** - To create effective, community specific supports that address additional barriers faced by members of marginalized communities, we recommend the gathering of North Shore



specific data in the context of domestic violence and sexual assault for women and gender diverse individuals who are:

- a. Indigenous
  - b. Racialized
  - c. Younger (between the ages of 15 to 24)
  - d. Older
  - e. Living with disabilities
  - f. Newcomers
  - g. LGBTQ2SIA+
3. **Implement Community Based Forensic Exams for Sexual Assault** - Implementation of specialized sexual assault forensic exams services is urgently needed, including:
- a. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) exams
  - b. Forensic kits
  - c. Integration with existing North Shore specific sexual assault supports
4. **Increase Funding for Support Services** - Increased funding for organizations that support women and gender diverse individuals experiencing violence is critical. It is essential to provide adequate services to support survivors. As seen through our survey, most survivors of violence experience psychological/emotional violence, therefore accessible and timely services like counselling, outreach, victim support, drop-in supports, support groups and related services are necessary. Domestic violence and sexual assault affect a significant number of women, and they often choose to seek support from community organizations. Organizations supporting women on the North Shore frequently lack sufficient funding for these services, and many available counselling supports have waitlists. This serves as a barrier to survivor healing and to organizations having resources to take part in community level initiatives beyond the direct scope of their work.



5. **Increase Focus on Men's Use of Violence** – Statistically, men are the vast majority gender of perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault. In order to address the systemic root causes of this violence, a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lens - considering the intersections of gender, race, ability, age, immigrant status, etc. - should be applied consistently to our understandings of and policies related to domestic violence and sexual assault. Further, increased services are required to support individual men and boys in identifying and healing from past traumas, challenging toxic attitudes about masculinity and addressing abusive behaviours that can lead to the use of violence in domestic relationships and to sexual assault.
  
6. **Increase Focus on Prevention** - Focusing more supports on violence prevention is a proactive approach to ending violence against women, girls and gender-diverse individuals. For example, programs such as Safe Dates, which is designed to prevent abuse in adolescent dating relationships, the Green Dot program, which is a by-stander-based program designed to prevent interpersonal violence perpetration and victimization have been proven beneficial in preventing sexual violence. Flip the Script is a 12 hour evidence based sexual assault resistance training program, and Angel Shot Code is a campaign to empower women to seek help, increase by-stander intervention, and prevent sexual assault in bars and restaurants. Healthy relationships programs for adults, improving income supports, workplace environments, housing programs, substance use programs and addressing community impacts of colonization, for example, have proven effective in preventing intimate partner violence.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/prevention.html>



7. **Community-Based Alternatives** - Strengthening of community-based alternatives, such as restorative and transformative justice. It is common for women to not formally report their experience(s) of domestic violence and/or sexual assault, and instead seek support elsewhere in the community for many valid reasons. One example is experiences of historical or ongoing systemic oppression. Having available alternatives can provide survivors with more agency and protect communities that may mistrust justice systems, such as newcomers, Black and Indigenous communities, and LGBTQ2SIA+ community members.
  
8. **Facilitate Networks of Support** - Networks of Support in the community would allow neighbourhood and community groups and associations to share best practices and to learn how to better support their members should they disclose violence. One service provider in our survey suggested an interfaith network of religious congregations. Other examples include engaging sports organizations and working closely with employers, such as through the “Make it our Business Campaign”.
  
9. **Increase Funding for Community Coordination** - Increased funding of the North Shore VAWIR Committee as an intersectional network of service providers to end violence against women and gender-diverse individuals on the North Shore so that we can continue to work together as a collective in the areas of coordination of services, policy change, public education and service provider training. By having a consistent and sustained presence, we have greater capacity to gather information about reports of domestic violence and sexual assault and under-take more initiatives to help keep women safe across our community.

