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Violence Against Young Women

For many, violence against young women is represented by media headlines telling of a student murdered by an ex-boyfriend, the suicide of a young woman who has been sexually assaulted and then further victimized through social media, or the abduction and captivity of young women. This violence is indeed devastating and warrants our attention, concern, and action.

At the same time, an understanding based on “the newsworthy” misses the continuum of violence that young women often experience, such as males rating girls’ breasts at school or through social media, the persistent degrading comments a young woman experiences from her boyfriend, the restrictions a male student places on his girlfriend’s behaviour, or the sexual assault of a roommate by a male ‘friend’ who believes ‘no’ means ‘yes’. The continuum of violence experienced by young women is too often unrecognized, downplayed, mislabeled, and misunderstood.

While concerned about all relationship violence, we recognize it has a [disproportionate and differential impact on women, and in particular, on young women](#). For instance, [police data](#) on violence against women tell us that

- **young women aged 15 to 24 are at the greatest risk of experiencing violence both within and outside of intimate relationships.**

We know people experience violence differently and that each person’s experience is affected by many factors such as sex, race, age, ability, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity, and income level. When stereotypes, prejudices, and social inequities related to these factors exist, they

- **place some at higher risk for being targeted for violence,**
- **affect how violence is experienced by an individual,**
- **shape the consequences of violence for an individual, and**

- **influence the help or support experienced following violence.**

“A male in one of my classes stalked me on campus. [When the police showed up] they told me I couldn’t have interacted with him, because I said that I was responding to his voice. So the police assumed that I was hearing voices [because I’m deaf]. The police formed me and brought me to a psychiatric facility. Campus staff stated that they wouldn’t offer me accommodations unless I provided a full psychiatric assessment. I left that school.” ([Student Participant, Violence and Accessibility, p.17](#))

This gendered and layered understanding of young women’s experiences of violence is the foundational framework required to build inclusive research, policy, responses, and resources.

Learning from Lived Experience



Natalie Novak was murdered by her ex-boyfriend. She was 20 years of age. Her parents, Dawn and Ed Novak, reflect through [video](#) on Natalie’s preventable murder and their mission to prevent violence.

Violence Against Female Secondary School Students

More than **4 out of 10 Ontario girls** are the target of unwanted sexual comments or gestures¹



1 out of 4 Ontario girls report having been pressured into doing something sexual they did not want to do²



More than **4 out of 10 teenage girls** in Quebec experienced abuse by their boyfriends³



Violence Against Female College & University Students

Incidence of woman abuse in Canadian college & university dating relationships*:



Reported being psychologically abused⁴



Reported being sexually abused⁴



Reported being physically abused⁴

15-25%

North American female college & university students who will experience sexual assault during their academic career⁵

As of 2010, there were 582 cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada



In 85% of the 582 cases, the age of the victim was known (495 cases)

55% of these 495 cases involved women and girls under the age of 31

17% involved women and girls aged 18 yrs. and younger⁶

During one school year, **36%** of female students in **grades 7 to 12** experienced sexual harassment through texting, email, Facebook, or other electronic means.⁸

Self-reported victimization of women in Canada in 2009⁷

Compared to older women, women** aged 15 to 34 are:

3x

more likely to report non-spousal violent victimization

5x

more likely to report non-spousal sexual assault

2-3x

more likely to report non-spousal victimization in the last 12 months

Police-reported violence against women in Canada in 2011⁷

Young women aged 15 to 24 are:

- At greatest risk of all forms of police-reported violence against women
- The most vulnerable to sexual violence by a dating partner
- At greatest risk of being murdered by a current or former spouse

15 – 24 yrs.

25 – 34 yrs.

35 – 44 yrs.

45 – 54 yrs.

55 – 64 yrs.

65 & older

* median age of female participants is 20 years
**women with a current or former spouse

Consequences of Violence for Young Women

The consequences of violence are significant for all women and can affect every domain of their lives (e.g., psychological, physical, social). The nature and severity of the consequences of violence will be shaped by many factors (e.g., race, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, income level) and the stereotypes, prejudices and social inequities related to such factors. Her experience may also be shaped by the fact that she is transitioning to and navigating the increased autonomy (e.g., living away from home) and demands of early adult life (e.g., financial pressures, career

decisions). For instance, violence against a young woman may:

- amplify the self-consciousness and struggles readily experienced during this stage;
- result in coping strategies that may create other vulnerabilities (e.g., substance use, high risk sexual behaviours, suicidal ideation);
- increase her risk for experiencing future victimizations; and
- [compromise educational attainment and financial earnings.](#)

Current Gap – A Call to Researchers and Funders

In 1992, DeKeseredy and Kelly gathered [national incidence and prevalence data](#) on woman abuse in university and college dating relationships. Findings from this landmark Canadian study continue to be quoted because 20 years later these are the only incidence and prevalence data of this type. There is a need for a current incidence and prevalence study

on violence against young women that examines the continuum of violence (e.g., technology-related violence, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, harassment) experienced. Repeated measurements of this sort would help researchers to measure the impact of prevention initiatives over time (e.g., targeted education campaigns).

Promising Direction in Dating Violence Prevention



A 2011 [evaluation](#) of 4 dating violence prevention programs in Canadian schools identifies the importance of youth engagement and involvement in program delivery. Youth facilitators/mentors felt a sense of accomplishment and pride. Involved adults and peers viewed youth facilitators as more relatable, breaking down barriers to communication and trust, keeping things fresh and relevant, and role models who were valued and respected by adults.

Promising Strategies for Bystander Education Programs

Evaluations of bystander education programs point to this approach as a promising practice for ending sexual violence. Promising bystander programs:

- present sexual violence as a continuum and gender-based crime;
- recognize opportunities for intervention and illustrate helpful and safe responses;
- address bystander barriers to responding;
- embed the education into curriculum; and
- obtain policy and administrative support for the program.

[Learn more.](#)

Innovative Online Game to Educate Youth



[METRAC's](#) quiz game takes public education on issues related to sexual violence to the medium where young people feel at home – online gaming! [What.It.Is.](#) tests users' knowledge and includes information on definitions, survivor rights, and supports.

[Statistics Canada](#) revealed that the majority of internet users at home are Canadians 34 years and younger. [Canadian youth](#) are exhibiting the strongest rise in social networking engagement and viewing videos online.

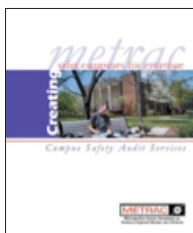
Initiatives to Watch

Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses

In 2012, [Status of Women Canada](#) provided 21 Canadian organizations with 2-year funding to promote equality and reduce gender-based violence on college and university campuses. All projects build partnerships and collaboration between campus and community stakeholders, identify factors associated with violence on campus, and develop responses to gender-based violence within their campus community. [Learn more](#) about the Ontario-based projects.

Leading the Way – Keeping Women Safer on Ontario Campuses

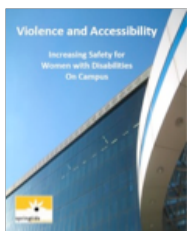
METRAC's Inclusive Safety Audits



In 1989, the [Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children](#) (METRAC), in partnership with the [Council of Ontario Universities \(COU\)](#), developed a [guide](#) for conducting campus safety audits. The goal is to audit all levels of campus life (e.g., physical environment, policies, resources, services, social dynamics) by conducting a gender-aware, anti-oppressive and intersectional analysis. The audit includes input from members of the campus community, including perspectives of those who may feel more vulnerable to violence (e.g., women, visible minorities, people with disabilities and deaf issues). Audit findings inform recommendations for responding to and preventing multiple forms of violence.

See METRAC's [video](#) showcasing the campus safety audit process for making post-secondary institutions safer for women and other vulnerable groups.

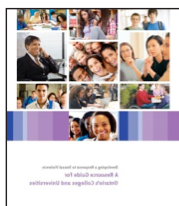
Springtide's Report on Safety for Women with DisAbilities



This [2012 Violence and Accessibility report](#) was developed by [Springtide Resources](#) with the purpose of initiating conversations among university and college administrators, faculty and staff about the experiences of women with disAbilities on campus. The voices of 17 young women with disAbilities who attended or were currently attending a college or university are reflected in the report. These women discussed their experience with violence

on campus and the barriers they faced when trying to access services and supports. These women also provided several recommendations for preventing violence on campus such as implementing training initiatives, improving accessibility to services and supports, promoting open discussions about disability and violence, and improving safety programs and infrastructure.

Developing a Response to Sexual Violence – A Resource Guide for Ontario's Colleges and Universities



This 2013 [guide](#) was developed by the [Ontario Women's Directorate](#) in collaboration with the [Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities](#), with input from organizations, associations and individuals in the post-secondary and violence against women sectors. The user-friendly guide provides information about sexual violence and provides information to assist colleges and universities in developing formal sexual violence policies and response

protocols. It includes helpful tools, including a sample statement of roles and responsibilities for campus groups and templates for sexual violence policies and protocols, local services listings, and campus safety alerts.

Bringing in the Bystander at the University of Windsor

This [initiative](#) at the University of Windsor is a three hour workshop that teaches men and women how to prevent sexual assaults before they occur. Unique to Canada, this is the only campus where a sexual violence prevention bystander program has been built into the curriculum of various courses. The workshop is delivered by trained male-female student pairs to more than 400 undergraduate students annually. [Learn more.](#)

Now Available on
vawlearningnetwork.ca

[Presentation Slides: VAW and CAS Collaboration Forum](#)

Keeping Children & Mothers Safe and Engaging Men who use Abusive Behaviours, Learning Network Forum, September 19, 2013.

[Videoed Presentations: VAW and CAS Collaboration Forum](#)

Keeping Children & Mothers Safe and Engaging Men who use Abusive Behaviours, Learning Network Forum, September 19, 2013.

[Natalie Novak – Learning from her Parents through Video](#)

Dawn and Ed Novak reflect on the murder of their daughter and their mission to end violence. October 2013.

[Bystander Sexual Violence Education Programs](#)

Learning Network Brief 09, October 2013.

[Status of Women Canada – Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses: The Ontario Projects](#)

Learning Network Brief 10, October 2013.

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