

Justice Options for Women who are Victims of Violence:

A Framework for ensuring that women who are victims of violence
are not re-victimized by justice options

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for the Restorative Justice Network
Conflict Resolution Cooperative of PEI

Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memories of Kimberley Ann Byrne, Cardigan and Debbie Holmes, Southport, who died of injuries received in brutal assaults by a partner and ex partner during the short time period of the Justice Options for Women Project.

We ask that anyone who reads this report remembers the lives of Kimberley and Debbie, their children, family, friends, neighbours and coworkers.

Justice Options for Women Project was sponsored by the Restorative Justice Network, Conflict Resolution Cooperative of PEI, and funded by Status of Women Canada and the Community Mobilization Program, National Crime Prevention Centre. There are three reports:

- Summary Report - 4 pages
- Final Report (includes Summary) - 30 pages
- Supplement (lists all options proposed) - 14 pages

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Acknowledgements

The wise guidance of the Advisory Committee steered the project away from a focus on restorative justice options to justice options. Their commitment to ensuring justice options as the foundation for the safety of women and children reflects the work of communities and governments in the past twenty-five years to make “public” the abuse of women and children. Restorative justice does need to be addressed, both from the concern that restorative justice risks making woman abuse “private” and the potential to support women who are victims of violence. This should not detract from the continuing efforts needed in the justice system.

This project received funding from Status of Women Canada and the Community Mobilization Program of the National Crime Prevention Centre.

The names of the approximately 40 women from across the Island who had experienced violence and participated in this project, do not appear in this report for the sake of their confidentiality. The women’s voices in this report express their frustration and anger, courage and tenacity, as well as their appreciation for respectfully offered assistance. Most of these women are mothers who expressed great concern for their children, now and in the future.

Advisory Committee:

Members of the Advisory Committee met regularly with project staff to provide guidance

Ellie Reddin, Victim Services	Bethany Doyle & Norma Gallant, Restorative Justice Network
Heidi Rankin, Advisory Council on the Status of Women	Ann Sherman, Community Legal Information Association
Lorna Hutcheson, PEI Rape/Sexual Assault Crisis Centre	Sandy Bentley, Inter-Ministerial Women’s Secretariat
Joanne Ings, Transition House Association	

Community Focus Group:

Community groups gave feedback about the project and ideas for speaking with women.

Canda McNeil, Council of the Disabled	Ann Wheatley, People First
Aggie Missaghian, PEI Association of Newcomers to Canada	Norma Gallant, Evangeline Community Consultative Group
Estelle Reddin & Margaret Prowse, DisAbled Women’s Network	

Reference Group:

Justice staff, community organizations and survivors of violence met twice for in-depth dialogue

Dave O'Brien, Crown Prosecutors Office	Orlo Jones, Senior Citizen’s Federation
Ellie Reddin, Victim Services	Phil Arbing, Office of the Attorney General
Teri Hall, Probation Services*	Ellen Ridgeway, Anderson House
Janet MacLeod	Richard Thibeault, RCMP*
Leona Arsenault	Paul Smith & Richard Collins*, Charlottetown City Police
Joanne Ings, Transition House Association	Sandra Dunsford, Child and Family Services*
Lorna Hutcheson, PEI Rape/Sexual Assault Crisis Centre	
Ann Wheatley, People First	
Bill Wiltshire, Community Chaplain*	(Able to attend one meeting)

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Summary Report

Introduction

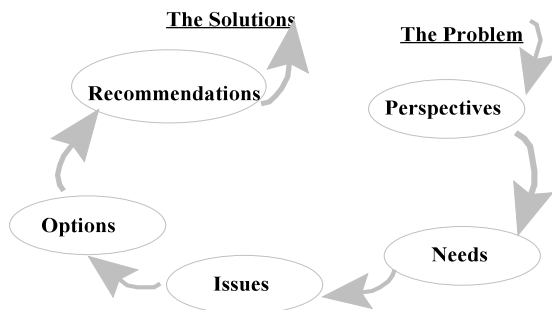
The *objective* of the framework is to assist policy makers and program developers in government and community organizations *to ensure that policy and program decisions do not re-victimize women victims of violence*. The information will assist policy makers and program developers to make improvements which support women victims of violence to gain safety, security and healing.

The information for the framework was compiled during focus groups and workshops with women who have been victims of violence, representatives of the justice system and its various options and child protection, representatives of restorative justice and community organizations. It resulted in four priority recommendations.

All meetings of the project followed an interest-based approach to problem-solving. The interest-based process is an accepted approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution used in a variety of settings including mediation, and organizational problem-solving. While the process is well documented, the use of the interest-based process in a comprehensive, system-wide, community-wide approach is unique.

Do policy and programming options meet the needs of women who are victims of violence?

Interest-based Problem-Solving Framework



Needs of Women & Helpers

Women Said . . . women who are victims of violence need:

- Access to help to stop the abuse
- Financial security
- Prevention of violence
- Safety for their children
- Ability to have some control over the process
- Safety for themselves
- To maintain family relationships
- Respect
- The abuser to be held accountable
- Support in making changes/breaking the cycle of abuse
- Information/education

(The framework does not represent the voices of all women, only those women who participated in the project. Specifically, very few or none of the project participants were Aboriginal women, survivors of sexual assault by strangers, newcomers to Canada or senior women.)

Government Representatives Said . . . to address violence against women they need:

- staff well informed about woman abuse issues
- effective/integrated services that meet the needs of women
- effective ways to increase women's safety (risk assessment, monitoring of no-contact orders)
- to take violence against women seriously and take care that options outside the current system do not decriminalize violence against women
- public perception that the system is taking violence against women seriously
- to ensure that service providers are not putting women in danger by sending them underground when they enforce no-contact orders against the wishes of the victim
- to understand why victims are not reporting and seeking help

Community Advocates Said . . . to address the needs of women who are victims of violence they need:

- easy access to services for victims
- supportive family law system
- people (victims/others) knowing what is available (outreach, more ways of getting information out)
- truth, honesty and openness in helper relationships
- service providers to understand women's background (e.g. women with intellectual disabilities) and root causes including power imbalances
- personal accountability of all helpers
- to know why women aren't reporting violence, especially sexual abuse, and to facilitate a feeling of safety in doing so

Issues and Options for Meeting the Needs of Women who Are Victims of Violence

In identifying the issues, people identified areas that most need to be addressed. Policy and program planners can ask these questions when developing and reviewing approaches.

There were several *common issues identified by all groups*:

- How can we ensure that women victims of violence have access to legal information and services?
- How can we ensure that the response by the justice system is safe, helpful, respectful, informed and does not revictimize victims of violence?
- How can we ensure that the justice system continues to take violence against women seriously?
- How can we support women victims of violence to heal, break the cycle of violence and stop the "merry-go-round" of abuse?
- How can we ensure that children who witness violence are supported and cared for?
- How can we ensure that services and justice options are effective, consistent, integrated and holistic?

Other issues identified by the *justice system* and *community advocates* include:

- How can we meet the need for public perception that justice is being done?
- How can we address conflicts between public and private interests?
- How can we make it easier for women to report violence?

Women in the focus groups and at a provincial women's workshop identified the following additional issues:

- How can we ensure that court orders are enforced by the system?
- How can we ensure that women have a voice in the process?
- How can we ensure that women victims of violence are protected financially when they leave their relationship?
- How can we help families and communities to support women victims of violence?

And, to expand on the issue of integrated and holistic services identified above, the women added the following issue:

- How can we ensure that family violence is taken into consideration in family court decisions, or How can we better integrate family and criminal systems of justice?

Are key issues being addressed by policy and program options?

Recommendations

Women, advocates, service providers and justice staff generated many ideas to address the needs and issues they had identified. When given the opportunity to select the most important ideas there were four priorities.

Recommendation # 1:

Support to Access Justice and Other Services

A woman's state of crisis, combined with lack of family supports, the complexities of the justice system, and realistic fears for her safety means that many women remain in abusive relationships. While

there were positive stories about justice interventions, many women who reflected on their experience of reporting abuse and using the justice system have negative stories to tell. The stories result from insensitive intervention, lack of information, lack of emotional support, or lack of justice options. These stories, retold in families and communities, increase the barriers for other women. It is important that women share their stories, and that women's experiences be respected.

Questions:

- How can women know where to get supportive information about their options?
- How can responses from police, social service, and other interveners be more consistent?
- How can we prevent women from falling through the cracks?
- How can important healing interventions be made available to help women regain their well-being and emotional, psychological and physical resources needed to make necessary changes?

Options: People suggested one person to take a woman from an early point of contact all the way through the process. This requires some foundational work, and can be met in a variety of ways

Who will ensure a holistic approach to meet the needs of women who are victims of violence?

Recommendation #2

Community to take violence against women seriously

Community attitudes and lack of family support isolates victims of abuse. Women who live in situations of abuse often feel that they not only have to leave their abusive partner, but their families, and communities as well. They worry about the impact on their children such as leaving friends, school and family.

Family and community denial or avoidance of abuse sends a message to the abuser and others, that abuse is tolerated. Abusers are not held accountable and are not supported to end the abuse and seek help.

Questions:

- How can families address abuse, support victims, hold abusers accountable and support abusers?
- How can communities take responsibility for safety of women and children in the community and at home?

Options:

The options include both community level planning and concrete activities. For example - identify a community group like Community Consultative Groups to provide leadership in local communities, and have information available through media, especially television.

Who will educate families and communities about their role in preventing violence against women and supporting women to heal?

Recommendation #3

Mechanism to Deal with the Total System and Hold the System Accountable

Parts of the justice system have improved, however there continues to be problems in relation to the system as a whole. There is no routine monitoring and evaluation, criteria for effective response, mechanism for community and victim feedback, consistent education about system approaches internally and externally. Eg. protocols, roles, mandates, functions.

The lack of system accountability means women fall through the cracks between parts of the system and have no mechanism for feedback (complaints). Justice and community interveners may provide feedback to each other on an individual situation, but do not have a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Without feedback processes, interveners are more likely to express their criticism

to others and not to the person/organization with whom there is a problem.. The system may be unaware of internal barriers.

Questions:

- How can the justice system as a whole be held accountable, beyond protocols for different parts?
- What mechanisms can be put in place for regular monitoring and evaluation of justice system including community organization and individual feedback?
- How can the desire for a more holistic approach to family and criminal matters be addressed without decriminalizing abuse?
- How can information about the effective working of the justice system be shared with others?

Options:

Mandate authority for whole system, and develop a process to ensure accountability.

Who will ensure that the system provides safety and security for women who are victims of violence?

Recommendation #4

Supporting Victims Financially

Women's economic security is essential to preventing abuse. Women often have to make the impossible choice between abuse and poverty and women don't report abuse because they fear they will subject themselves and children to a lifetime of poverty. For many women who leave abusive relationships the abuse continues through financial abuse, sometimes for many years.

Some women stay in abusive relationships because of the risk of poverty and the stigma of social assistance. Women continue to be abused financially in their process of leaving a relationship.

Questions:

- How can women be supported financially to leave an abusive relationship?

- How can interim help be provided without the stigma and poverty associated with social assistance?
- How can the justice system address “creative reporting” of finances by abusive partners?
- How can women be assisted toward economic security?

Options:

Short and long-term solutions are needed: in the short-term financial abuse must be addressed and emergency funding to leave an abusive relationship must be available, and in the longer-term women need opportunities for education, employment and income.

Who will address women’s economic security as fundamental to preventing violence against women?

Guiding Principles

Participants discussed their beliefs about safety from violence for women as the foundation of priorities. Policy and program options must be guided by principles such as: believing the victim; all types of abuse are unacceptable at any level; women need to perceive interveners as allies; services must be holistic and based on victim needs; everyone in a helping or intervention role must be accountable for respectful, sensitive, flexible, appropriate and effective intervention; services must be available and accessible; processes must be transparent so women know what intervention and support can be available; justice interventions need to be holistic - citizens don’t separate the justice system into jurisdictions (criminal/family); an attitude of let’s find a way to meet your needs (rather than “yes, BUT”); victims and advocates are included in individual and policy decisions; women need options and opportunities to make choices.

What beliefs or assumptions guide policy and programming options?

Introduction

The *objective* of this framework is to assist policy makers and program developers in government and community organizations *to ensure that policy and program decisions do not revictimize women victims of violence*. The information will assist policy makers and program developers to make improvements which support women victims of violence to gain safety, security and healing. The goal of the Justice Options for Women who are Victims of Violence project was to ensure that there are options for women and that justice options do not revictimize women.

The information for the framework was compiled during focus groups and workshops with women who have been victims of violence, representatives with mandated authority in the different parts of the justice system and child protection, representatives of restorative justice and community organizations. The information outlines the perspectives, interests and issues that each group identified. This information assisted participants to collectively consider ideas for change which could result in women being safer and feeling more respected as they become involved in the various justice options. It resulted in four priority recommendations.

All meetings followed an interest-based approach to problem-solving. The interest-based process is an accepted approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution in a variety of settings including mediation, and organizational problem-solving. While the process is well documented, the use of the interest-based process in a comprehensive, system-wide, community-wide approach is unique. The process was used to ensure that everyone's voice was heard and that the project participants had the information necessary to make recommendations about how best to meet the needs of women who are victims of violence by considering the needs of all parties.

During Reference Group meetings, Workshop with Women, and Workshop on Framework the steps of the interest-based process were outlined:

Step 1 Set a Positive Environment

Step 2 Identify the Problems

- What are the perspectives of the various groups?

Step 3 Identify & Explore Interests

- What are the underlying needs, concerns, values and fears of the various groups?

Step 4 Identify the Issues

- What are the issues that need to be addressed?

Step 5 Generate Creative Options

- How can the issues be addressed?

Step 6 Verify and Close the Agreement

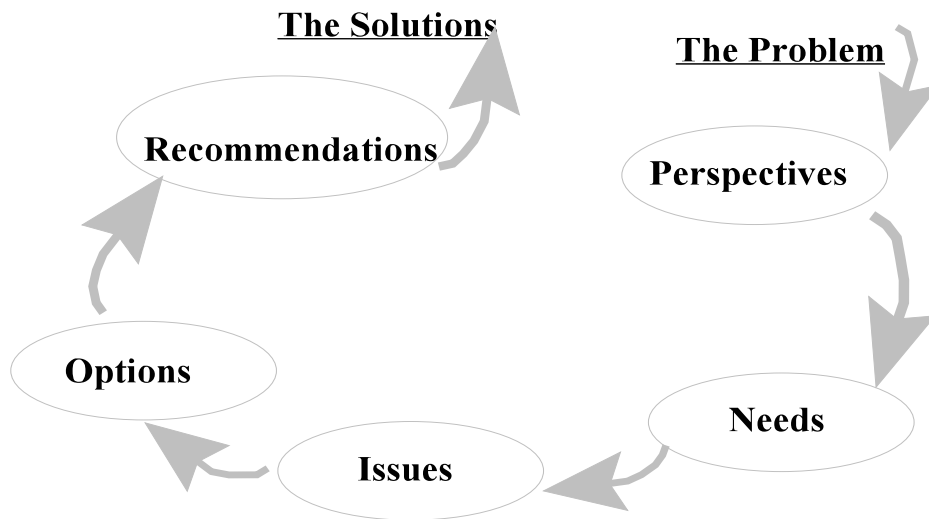
- What will we do and how will we know we are making progress?

During five focus groups with women, the process was introduced as:

- This is our purpose, we want to hear your stories and ideas (positive environment)
- What is your experience with the justice system (perspectives)
- What are your needs or concerns in relation to justice (interests)
- What are the most important issues (issues)
- What ideas do you have for improving the justice system (options)

This framework first presents the needs identified by women. The framework does not represent the voices of all women, only those women who participated in the project. Specifically, very few or none of the project participants were Aboriginal women, survivors of sexual assault by strangers, newcomers to Canada or senior women. Next, the framework outlines the needs identified by Government - those with mandated authority, and by Community - those who advocate and support women. Following the needs, the key issues and options are identified, followed by recommendations. While four priorities areas were identified by participants, there were many ideas offered. These are outlined in a *Supplementary Report - Options*.

Interest-based Problem-Solving Framework



This Framework is not an answer to woman abuse. For the most part, the Framework asks questions that can guide policy and program development. After twenty-five years of incremental changes to policing policies, victim and community services, and sentencing practices, abuse of women continues with tragic results. In policy and program planning we need to take time to reflect on underlying issues and be courageous in addressing the difficult questions.

Some questions to consider:

- Do policy and program options meet the needs of women who are victims of violence?
- Are key issues being addressed by policy and program options?
- What beliefs or assumptions guide policy and program options?
- Who will ensure a holistic approach to meet the needs of women who are victims of violence?
- Who will educate families and communities about their role in preventing violence against women and supporting women to heal?
- Who will ensure that the system provides safety and security for women who are victims of violence?
- Who will address women's economic security as fundamental to preventing violence against women.?

This report has been sent to participants and to individuals, committees, departments and organizations with authority to act in support of women who are victims of violence. Personal letters to the Premier, Attorney General, Minister of Health and Social Services, Minister of Human Resource Development Canada, Minister of Justice Canada, Chairs - Premiers Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention, Victim Services Advisory Committee, Association of Chiefs of Police, Provincial Director of Welfare, Provincial Director of Child Welfare, Director Family Law Section, Chief Justice Supreme Court, Chief Judge Provincial Court, Chief Crown Attorney, Chief Superintendent RCMP, Chiefs of Police - Charlottetown and Summerside, asked for specific action and requested a reply.

The Problem

We asked project participants about their perspectives with regard to justice options and violence against women. This framework does not represent the voices of all women, only those women who participated in the project. Specifically, very few or none of the project participants were Aboriginal women, survivors of sexual assault by strangers, newcomers to Canada or senior women. As well, we did not strive for consensus during the project's focus groups or workshops.

Women's Perspectives

During the focus groups held with women, we heard from many their stories of feeling re-victimized by various justice options. Following are some examples:

Women feel re-victimized by the system...

- when the family law system takes years to come to a resolution and a woman has to go on social assistance because her partner won't pay support until he's ordered to and until that order is enforced
- when an abuser controls the family's money and can afford to file motion after motion to thwart her efforts to get her share and she can't afford to pay a lawyer to respond and so she gives in
- when she finally gets an order from the court and feels like things might start to get on track for her family and he refuses to follow the order and no-one will enforce it until she pays more money to a lawyer
- when the courts make an order for the abuser to have access with his children and he emotionally abuses them and she doesn't have any support to protect them
- when stay away orders aren't enforced and abusers can continue to enter their spouse's home, intimidate them in their hospital rooms and continue to harass subtly with no repercussions
- when a woman is not eligible for legal aid and she is forced to return to the abuse until she can afford to leave
- when a woman has an order stating that she has sole possession of the family home but the utility company won't let her change the utilities into her own name without her husband's consent
- when the police don't have the power to do anything to help a woman who fears her husband until he actually hurts her
- when she is treated like an "hysterical woman" and told to "calm down" instead of listened to
- when she doesn't understand that mediation is voluntary and feels forced to participate and intimidated into giving up her rights
- when she isn't believed or is told that she is exaggerating
- when a service provider doesn't understand the cycle of violence and blames her for staying so long or going back
- when many of the services being provided, like mediation and parenting courses, are deemed "not appropriate for situations of abuse" but no substitutes are offered

- when service providers don't understand how abusers can manipulate and they say "well, he seems more reasonable than she does"

Government Perspectives

Justice System Staff sometimes feel caught between their mandated authority and the needs of the victim . . .

- there is a problem with no-contact orders when there are continual requests from the victim for contact with the offender; if contact isn't arranged through probation office or child protection, people go underground and meet without permission, the offender then has more control and the potential for abuse increases
- there is a conflict between public interest vs. victim needs/rights; this happens when there is an issue of safety for children in the home, of disclosure if Crown meets with witness/victim prior to trial, and with concern for the victim with a judges finding of not guilty and the victim gets the message that the "accused has won"
- with a legal mandate to ensure children's safety, the reality is that children's safety takes priority over victim needs; when the victim can't ensure children's safety by protecting them from the abuser; the safety of the children must take priority
- justice system is a band-aid solution - afterward people are back to square-one, the problem isn't solved; people need parenting skills, life-skills, communication skills

Justice System can't meet the needs of victims . . .

- people need assistance police can't provide; RCMP bound by Privacy Act and cannot pass name along to Victim Services without the victim's permission and people get lost in the shuffle; need an informed decision about services - victims lack comprehension about system/services especially when in crisis; some victims are hostile
- there is no safety shield to put around the victim; victim can feel a false sense of safety; justice/social service system has its shortcoming with victims in need; need a "team approach" and evaluation process; everyone working has to support each other and remain objective - keep realistic confidence in the system/process; criticism to victim about other services takes foundation of support away - need to follow a process for feedback and accountability
- complex issue needs individual responses but the law and policy is black and white; policies and guidelines with zero tolerance may be good, but it's difficult to put into practice what is black and white such as no contact orders of courts and disclosure

- violence against women is within the context of societal issues and social perception; need to pay attention to research and evidence; we have more resources than we did five or ten years ago, how do we make the best use of the resources that exist

Community Perspectives

Need more focus on prevention . . .

- focus on prevention by intervening with children; family abuse is complex and breaking the cycle must focus on children who are victims; intervention/counselling is needed so they do not continue the cycle of abuse in adult behaviours; until parties accept the end of the relationship there is a need to work with both parties to learn some skills in resolving conflicts
- need more individualized response because of problems of complexity and variation in cycle of violence; dilemma at front-end of protecting the victim yet providing her with choices; every case is different and domestic violence is so complex along a spectrum ranging from those who want abuser to get help and want to continue the relationship to those who no longer want a relationship and need protection
- service providers can take women's upset responses personally and start blaming the victim - it's not the victim, it's the dynamic; need to not oversimplify and not use a blanket approach

Justice system doesn't meet needs of vulnerable victims . . .

- senior/older victims never go to court - they are institutionalized; women victims are more vulnerable than older men because they have depended on their husbands for financial responsibilities, when widowed they can be victimized by family taking everything; abuse can lead to death; women won't tell and ask for help - no money, no transportation, if children are abusing them, they feel ashamed because they brought the children up
- women with intellectual disabilities need to deal with their fear of the system before access to justice; level of abuse of women with intellectual disabilities is very high - grew up in institutions/foster care where they didn't have control; big fear of justice system - grew up hearing they were not smart and they would not be believed
- for women who are sexually abused there are not a lot of justice options - gathering of proof/evidence ends up revictimizing the victim; need care with restorative options, may not be in best interest of victim to meet with offender; need to find ways to support each other by working collaboratively including giving each other feedback

Women lack access to justice . . .

- need access to legal advice; it's a complex issue and a very slow process of working with women; at the same time we need to speed up some legal processes

Needs of Women and Helpers

Women

The women who participated in the project identified their needs and concerns:

- Help to stop the abuse
- Financial security
- Prevention of violence
- Their children's safety
- The ability to have some control over the process
- Safety for themselves
- To maintain family relationships
- Respect
- The abuser to be held accountable
- Support in making changes/breaking the cycle of abuse
- Information/education

Women Need Help to Stop the Abuse

Women need access to timely and respectful processes and resources which will support them to break the cycle of abuse. They need to be able to trust that these processes and resources keep them and their children safe from further abuse. The women who participated in the focus groups were more likely to access help if:

- she knew that she would be respected by the people and processes she looked to for help
- it was affordable
- it was in her community or transportation was available
- accessing the service/process didn't require that she give up other supports, her job, etc.
- it was in a language she spoke and understood well
- it was simple to understand (plain language, few and uncomplicated steps to follow)
- accessing the assistance didn't put her in further danger of being abused

Voices of Women

"I used all my savings to pay for the lawyers and I'm at the point where I have to declare bankruptcy and nothing is settled yet."

"I need to be able to keep him out of my house - the police says it's ok if he comes in because he's my husband."

"Anderson House told me that I was at risk of losing my kids and my house because I couldn't take my oldest kids with me so I had to go back to him until all the legal pieces fell into place (which took more than a month of further abuse) - the legal process needs to be changed to keep women safe, not send them back."

"There needs to be a humanisation of the justice system - we're not all lawyers, we're not all emotion-free, business-like people."

"There needs to be an understanding between family and criminal law - they impact so much on each other but are treated as if they are separate by the courts."

"There needs to be tighter legal enforcement of trespassing, peace bonds, restraining orders, etc. - we need real action not a piece of paper."

Women Need Financial Security

For the women who participated in the focus groups, financial security means:

- being able to support their children without drastically changing the lifestyle that they are accustomed to
- that the abuser takes his share of the responsibility for supporting the children
- enough money to ensure that the children have suitable child care, if the mother has to work
- a dwelling that is hers and the children's with no control exercised over it by her partner
- to keep her share of the assets that she has worked to build
- transportation

Voices of Women

“My Emergency Protection Order says I’m in control of the house but they wouldn’t do anything when he cut off the utilities, which were in his name.”

“Social services helped financially, made me sign a paper I would pay it back when I got a settlement.”

“I used RRSP to pay lawyer’s retainer fee, now I’m being charged with fraud because I didn’t report it; I have to use what little assets I have and its ruining my life.”

“The legal aid system is terrible - when you’re in an abusive situation and you’re working there’s no legal aid and there’s nothing anybody can do - and he’s allowed to do what he wants.”

“Some women don’t have a car and its hard to leave if you need a drive somewhere and there’s no one you can ask.”

Women Need Prevention of Violence

In the experience of the women who participated in the focus groups, a lot of frustration came from the emphasis that the system seems to place on reaction as opposed to prevention. By prevention, women mean:

- service providers taking responsibility and intervening early/asking questions when they suspect abuse
- quick responses to violent crisis
- making sure that men get treatment to change behaviour
- service providers taking action to help before a crime is committed

Voices of Women

“Doctors don’t usually say anything if there are just bruises - only if there are blood and broken bones.”

“When I called the police they asked ‘is he hitting you?’ - I said no but I’m afraid he will hurt us and they said ‘well, we can’t come unless he hurts you - call us when he does that’.”

“My child’s teacher said [to me after we left the home] - ‘I noticed a difference in your child’ - I would have appreciated a call - for her to take some responsibility/initiative.”

Women Need Safety for their Children

When we asked women what their needs were one of the areas that was discussed most was the need to keep their children safe and support in doing that. When they used the word, “safe”, the women meant many different things:

- safe from all abuse by the abusive partner - not just the forms that are criminal offenses
- safe from harming themselves, emotionally or physically
- safe from growing up to have difficulties coping
- safe from drastic changes in lifestyle
- safe from confusion about what is happening between their parents

Voices of Women

“Children need to be heard - my kids wrote letters to the judge and the family court counselor got rid of them. During the Home Study the counselor spent about 10 minutes with the kids and 15 minutes at our home.”

“Its confusing for mothers how to educate kids about what their father is doing (harassment, financial abuse) without putting him down and without putting kids in the middle.”

“Without the help of the Family Resource Team (Child and Family), I wouldn’t have had the strength to get through.”

“I asked the guidance counsellors to keep an eye on my kids and they were awesome, they built a bond with the kids.”

“There isn’t enough protection with regard to custody protection of children when women leave the home - social services says its up to the mother to protect the children but give no support to do that - when I asked my social worker to take the kids from him she said, “I can take the children from you because you haven’t protected them by letting him have [legal] access to them.”

“ [The court says that] I have to send my child with a man that abuses him, makes threats against my life in front of him. If you’re un-cooperative [by not allowing access] then you look bad in front of the judge.”

“There needs to be “child protection” especially where there’s emotional abuse - he knows he can get away with that.”

Women Need To Have Some Control Over The Process

The focus group participants indicated that they need to be have ways to hold service providers accountable if they are not treated with respect or if they are given inaccurate information. The women’s voices on system accountability are included in the next section.

Women Need Safety for Themselves

When talking about their own safety as a need, the women participating in the focus groups indicated that, in addition to requiring assistance in staying safe from criminal behaviour, they need:

- protection from subtle harassment
- a safe place to live
- processes which do not give the abuser further opportunity to control, abuse her and intimidate her into giving up her rights
- to be able to count on enforcement of decisions made
- the victim’s safety and preventing further abuse to be the main priorities in sentencing
- safety from threats of violence against other family members

Voices of Women

“The system doesn’t offer protection from the subtle harassment - police can only do something when its too late.”

“Mediation was difficult and the mediator should have stopped him lots of times but in the long run it was a blessing to me - I had gotten enough counseling that I was able to focus on the safety of the kids - he thought he was controlling the process and I let him think that to get what was important for me.”

“It’s easy to give up rights in mediation [because] no-one is there to protect you.”

“911 put me on hold when I called to say that I was being assaulted.”

“If I had to do it again, I wouldn’t. I was told promises by the Crown he would get federal time and I believed it at the time, but they’re not in control of what happens - with a 20 year history of abuse he was sentenced to 17 months, and spent only 3 months in jail after sentence.”

“Probation needs to be followed through with stay away orders, anger management - [the probation officer] said she was too busy to follow through with anger management.”

Women Need To Maintain Family Relationships

Some women said that one of the reasons they hesitated in telling someone about the abuse was their need to maintain family relationships. One woman was being abused by her brother-in-law and didn't want to hurt or lose the support of his wife, her sister.

Women Need Respect

Women told stories of the responses that they received from the justice system, from social services, from community organizations and from others in positions to help. The responses that helped were from compassionate people who understood the dynamics of abuse and who listened to them and believed them. The responses that did not help, not surprisingly, were from the service providers who did not listen, did not believe them and who told the woman in so many words, "it's your fault" or "it's not as big a deal as you are making it out to be".

In terms of respect, women want:

- to be listened to
- to be believed
- not to be judged or told it's her fault
- some indication in the sentencing that the court takes her abuse seriously
- compassion
- to feel valued as a person/client
- confidentiality

Voices of Women

"If the community thinks he's great no one believes you and you lose support."

"The police treated me like I didn't know what I was talking about - like I didn't exist. We were standing in my kitchen and one officer said to the other 'Do you think this warrants an EPO?' I responded and said 'yes' and he said 'I wasn't talking to you'."

"The police officer was trying to make me understand how a man feels - I said do you know how I feel?"

"It's hard to tell anyone; by the time a woman makes the big decision and it goes to court it's all over the papers; [as well as] announced over the [police] scanner."

"I probably wouldn't have stayed so long in my abusive relationship if I had encountered a better response."

"The abuser should be treated as if he was a stranger on the street when it comes to sentencing - it is minimized by the courts - why does it matter how long you were together or if you invited him to come have tea - they need to get rid of that attitude of 'if you let him come and have tea its your fault, make a decision - do you want him in your life or not - if you keep getting back with him we can't do anything for you'."

"The officer said to me that "it sounds like this is turning into a pissing match between you and your husband" and told me to go to a lawyer."

Women Need The Abuser to Be Held Accountable

Participants in the focus groups felt strongly that sentences need to send the message that violence against women is a serious crime.

Women Need Support in Making Changes to Break the Cycle of Abuse

In addition to support from family and having someone they trust to tell about the abuse, women identified the following as helpful in breaking the cycle of abuse:

- taking action before the violence occurs, when indicators are there and a woman asks for help
- recognizing the difficulties of joint custody when there is violence and making safe orders
- providing counselling/information to women
- keeping the abuser out of the victim's home
- helping her to protect her children and provide counselling support for the children
- recognizing and understanding the cycle so you can better help her
- ensuring that response times and the justice process is quick
- enforcing decisions, don't leave it up to the woman
- empowering her to make her own choices
- not asking women to make the decision to charge her spouse
- providing 24 hour services (crisis may not occur between 8 and 4 on a weekday)
- providing someone to take care of women whose abuser is their caregiver
- not overwhelming the woman by complicated processes or by making her repeat her story over and over
- be open to talking about abuse and let clients know that
- be compassionate

Voices of Women

"How will you have the energy to call person after person until you find someone who believes you and can/will help you?"

"I came from another country and was very isolated - everybody is related to my ex and I didn't dare say anything."

"The RCMP was wonderful - [the officer] said it was a little beyond what she was supposed to do but she talked to him anyway and warned him not to harass me."

"The police did want to help me but were limited in what they could do."

"The Outreach workers, Victims services and Anderson House were all great."

"My doctor's office has a sign that says you can talk to him/her about abuse."

Women Need Information/Education

Information and education was a need women identified, not just for themselves, but for others, as well. For the women themselves, they need information about:

- what constitutes an abusive/healthy relationship
- where to go for help
- how to protect themselves financially (from the start) in a relationship
- ideas for preventing stranger abuse
- parenting education for families in crisis
- that its not her fault
- clear information about options
- what options are available if the orders made don't work

For the abuser:

- understanding about the impact of his behaviour on his victims, including the children

Police, judges, social workers, lawyers need education about:

- how to properly use the present legislation
- the cycle and dynamics of abuse
- how to work with an abuser
- how to be compassionate, less judgmental
- how to support a woman who has been abused

Family and general public need education about :

- the cycle and dynamics of abuse

Government

Representatives of the justice system and child protection who have mandated authority to provide services identified the following needs:

Needs:

- staff well informed about woman abuse issues
- effective/integrated services that meet the needs of women
- effective ways to increase women's safety (risk assessment, monitoring of orders)
- to take violence against women seriously and take care that options outside the current system do not decriminalize violence against women
- the public to perceive that the system is taking violence against women seriously
- to ensure that service providers are not putting women in danger by sending them underground when they enforce no-contact orders against the wishes of the victim
- to understand why victims are not reporting and seeking help

Community

Representatives of community organizations who provide services or advocate for victims of violence identified the following needs.

Needs:

- victims to easily access services
- family law as a system of support
- people (victims/others) knowing what is available (outreach, more ways of getting information out)
- truth, honesty and openness in helper relationships
- service providers to understand women's background (e.g. women with intellectual disabilities) and root causes including power imbalances
- personal accountability of all helpers
- to know why women aren't reporting violence, especially sexual abuse, and to facilitate a feeling of safety in doing so

Issues and Options for Meeting the Needs of Women who are Victims of Violence

In identifying the issues, we asked people at each meeting to select areas that most needed to be addressed in the area of justice options for women victims of violence. Policy and program planners can ask these questions when developing and reviewing approaches.

There were several *common issues identified by all groups*:

- How can we ensure that women victims of violence have access to legal information and services?
- How can we ensure that the response by the justice system is safe, helpful, respectful, informed and does not revictimize victims of violence?
- How can we ensure that the justice system continues to take violence against women seriously?
- How can we support women victims of violence to heal, break the cycle of violence and stop the “merry-go-round” of abuse?
- How can we ensure that children who witness violence are supported and cared for?
- How can we ensure that services and justice options are effective, consistent, integrated and holistic?

Other issues identified by *justice system staff* and *community advocates* include:

- How can we meet the need for public perception that justice is being done?
- How can we address conflicts between public and private interests?
- How can we make it easier for women to report violence?

Women in the focus groups and at a provincial women’s workshop identified the following additional issues:

- How can we ensure that court orders are enforced by the system?
- How can we ensure that women have a voice in the process?
- How can we ensure that women victims of violence are protected financially when they leave their relationship?
- How can we help families and communities to support women victims of violence?

And, to expand on the issue of integrated and holistic services identified above, the women added the following issue:

- How can we ensure that family violence is taken into consideration in family court decisions or How can we better integrate family and criminal systems of justice?

During the focus groups and workshops with women and the Reference Group, we gathered ideas about how to resolve the issues identified by each group. Following are a summary of the solutions generated during the process.

How can we ensure that women victims of violence have access to legal information and services?

Some of the options generated to resolve this issue include providing *Family Law Legal Aid* for women leaving abusive relationships, establishing the position of *Ombudsperson* that women can look to to hold system accountable, create positions for *Women's Advocates*, who can help women through the system step by step all the way through all the systems, create *one central point of access* for services and information, create more *Informational Resources* to assist women in determining what options they have, look at *Accessibility Issues*, such as service locations, operating hours and access to programs which meet the specific needs of women who have experienced violence.

Other options suggested include having some *service providers who have personally experienced violence*, providing *services to all family members* including counselling and education and exploring the *use of community processes like Restorative Justice*.

How can we ensure that the response by the justice system is safe, helpful, respectful, informed and does not revictimize victims of violence?

Some of the options listed above were identified as options that could also resolve this issue. In addition, project participants suggested routine *Evaluation and Monitoring* of services, *Education or Training* for service providers in issues related to violence against women, a *Domestic Court* which could deal with all matters related to violence against women, including family and criminal law, a *Specialized Inter-disciplinary Team* to work with women and a *top down mandate* for consistent response, holding staff accountable for mistakes and improvement of services.

In addition, there needs to be some changes made in the current services and policies to *Reduce Women's Contact with the Abuser*, speed up the process for family court, including improvement of the process for home studies, *Make Safety a Priority and Provide Support for Women Beyond Legal Assistance*.

How can we ensure that the justice system continues to take violence against women seriously?

Project participants suggested treating victims of violence with respect and dignity, creating a *Domestic Court*, using the *Statement of Principles* in the Victims of Crime Act as guidelines and hold service providers accountable through *Routine Evaluation and Monitoring*.

How can we support women victims of violence to heal, break the cycle of violence and stop the “merry-go-round” of abuse?

Some suggestions include ensuring the criminal justice process works well and empowers women by *Educating Women* and empowering them to make choices for themselves, *Educating Service Providers* to empower women, *Educating Families and Communities* about family violence, *Supporting Victims Financially* when they attempt to leave abusive relationships, and *Creating a Holistic Response* to violence against women which goes beyond the justice system.

How can we ensure that children who witness violence are supported and cared for?

Public Education and *Education for Families* about healthy relationships and how to resolve conflict without violence was identified as an option. Other ways to support children who have been exposed to violence in their homes include *Provide Financially for Children, Provide Counselling for Children, Protect Children from Further Abuse* by ensuring that custody and access orders to not place children in the company of a physically, sexually or emotionally abusive parent and listen to children and believe what they say about abuse.

How can we ensure that services and justice options are effective, consistent, integrated and holistic?

Participants suggested that putting in place a *Specialized Inter-Disciplinary Response Team, Women’s Advocate, Domestic Court, Training/Education* for all service providers about the protocols, roles, mandates and functions of each other, clear *Policies* on enforcement of orders and *Routine Evaluation or Monitoring* can assist in creating a more holistic response.

How can we meet the need for public perception that justice is being done?

Suggestions from project participants focussed on sentencing, specifically, giving *more recognition of victim pain in sentencing* and ensuring that *sentences reflect the horrendous nature of the crime*.

How can we address conflicts between public and private interests?

It was suggested by the participants that it will be important to have *Further Dialogue about this Issue* with a focus on addressing issues about why women are reluctant to report violence or have charges laid.

Other suggestions include *Making Safety the Goal, not Law Enforcement and Being Clear with Victims with regard to their Options and the Law.*

How can we make it easier for women to report violence?

Putting in place *Specialized Service Providers* with training in the area of violence against women, reassuring women that when they leave an abusive relationship they will be taken care of financially and not subjecting themselves and their children to lifetime of poverty, *Centralizing Information* so that women don't have to go looking for it, providing *Training for Service Providers* on how to treat victims of violence with respect and dignity were all identified as possible way to encourage women to report violence.

How can we ensure that court orders are enforced by the system?

There must be *Enforcement Policies* put in place to ensure that peace bonds, restraining orders, and other orders are enforced by the system so that women aren't put in the position of having to pay more for legal services to get the orders enforced. Regular *Evaluation of Enforcement Policies* will be important to ensure that women have a way to hold service providers accountable. As well, once a settlement or a judgement has been made, providing women with information about what that means and what options are then available if things aren't working will assist.

How can we ensure that women have a voice in the process?

Project participants recommended having *input from victims at every stage*, including program development and evaluation. Again, creating positions for an *Ombudsperson* and *Women's Advocates* will assist women to have their voices heard.

How can we ensure that women victims of violence are protected financially when they leave their relationship?

Some suggestions made by participants include a *Guaranteed Annual Income, Employment Training* for women who are emotionally and physically able to work, *Funded Daycare, Funded Transportation, Emergency Financial Support* for women leaving abusive relationships, *Education/Information* for women about how to protect themselves financially in a relationship, *Protection of Assets* when women leave the relationship, *Ensuring Support Payments Meet the Needs of the Family* and ensuring that *Social Assistance* makes it possible to choose a Healthy Lifestyle.

How can we help families and communities to support women victims of violence?

Project participants suggested that the way to resolve this issue is through *Public Education*, including providing information about violence against women through *the media*, through *community presentations*, through *community projects* and through *policy*.

Other suggestions include *Starting Education in Schools, Support Other Family Members* (not just women and children) and *Educating Service Providers Outside Justice System*.

How can we ensure that family violence is taken into consideration in family court decisions or How can we better integrate family and criminal systems of justice?

Some suggestions include a *Unified Family Court* or Domestic Court and *integrating civil and criminal system access points*.

Recommendations

Women, advocates, service providers and justice staff generated many ideas to address the needs and issues they had identified. When given the opportunity to select the most important ideas they identified four priorities:

- 1 Ongoing Support to Access Justice and Other Services
- 2 Communities and Families to Take Violence Against Women Seriously
- 3 Mechanism to Deal with Total System and Hold the System Accountable
- 4 Financial Support for Victims to Leave and Start Over

Recommendation # 1: Ongoing Support to Access Justice and Other Services

Issue:

Women frequently do not report relationship abuse and/or sexual abuse. There are many reasons that women don't report abuse: the history of the justice system not taking violence against women seriously at all prior to 1980 and ongoing justice system barriers, social attitudes that continue to blame the victim, fear of escalating violence once the abuse is reported, concern about impact of separation on children, extended family pressures to keep the peace at any cost, and a woman's own desire to make the relationship work and hope that she can change or make the abuser change.

Women find support at Anderson House, Transition and Support Services and Victim Services. National figures estimate that only 18% of abused women contact transition homes like Anderson House. PEI is fortunate to have Transition House Outreach Services available across the province. Women also find Victim Services helpful. Victim Services does not usually know about women who are abused until after their contact with police, and in the case of the RCMP, only on referral.

When a woman gains the courage to disclose abuse and to ask for help from a helping or justice agency she is aware that she is taking a great risk. She puts her trust in the person or system that she has contacted. The first step of disclosing abuse opens up many options.

Imagine being exhausted from emotional, psychological and physical stress and wanting nothing more than to rest in safety when you are dropped in a foreign land and presented with many roads and paths. You don't know where any of these lead, you can't return, and you must pick one. You may be grateful to find a travel book at your feet, but it's in a language you don't quite understand. What do you want? You probably want a person who speaks your language and the language of the situation you find yourself in, understands your situation, and is familiar with the paths ahead. You also want this person to walk with you on the path until you feel safe, secure and confident in taking the next steps on your own.

Impact:

A woman's state of crisis, combined with lack of family supports, the complexities of the justice system, and realistic fears for her safety, means that many women remain in abusive relationships. Some take the first step of making a call and, without a supportive response, return to the familiar albeit unsafe. Some, keep going forward and find support at some point in the process.

While there are positive stories of justice intervention, many women who reflect on their experience of reporting abuse and using the justice system have negative stories to tell. The stories result from insensitive intervention, lack of information, lack of emotional support, or lack of justice options. These stories, retold in families and communities, increase the barriers for other women. It is important that women share their stories, and that women's experiences be respected, and it is important that these stories become more positive.

Women who have the emotional and physical strength to advocate for themselves and/or find an advocate in the community or the justice system, do tell stories about what worked - a sensitive police officer, Victim Services support and information, court experience that validated the victim's experience, sentencing that held the abuser accountable. Other positive factors include family and community support such as Transition House Outreach and Support Services.

Questions:

- How can women get supportive information about their options
- How can responses from police, social service, and other interveners be more consistent
- How can we prevent women from falling through the cracks
- How can important healing interventions be made available to help women regain their well-being and emotional, psychological and physical resources needed to make needed changes

Options:

Women expressed the need for one person to take a woman who is a victim of violence from point of contact all the way through the justice process and other services. This requires some foundational work, and can be met in a variety of ways

Foundational Work includes:

- Validating and promoting the role of a support person/advocate within the justice system
- Identifying the support person/advocate and clarifying their role
- Training the support person/advocate and system staff
- Promoting the role in the public with a priority on women who are abused
- Monitoring and evaluating the approach

Options for Support Person/Advocate:

- Expand the role and resources of Transition and Support Workers
- Identify Victim Services as a point of entry
- Have a support person/advocate at police departments

Recommendation #2 Community to Take Violence Against Women Seriously

Community safety for women is like chocolate in a chocolate cake. There is no safety in a community, unless there is safety for women. Workshop Participant

Issue:

People are more aware of abuse and many public education efforts are very successful. Abuse of women and children is not a taboo subject anymore and help is available. At the same time in smaller local communities there is a need for more visibility of organizations such as Community Consultative Groups to provide leadership for preventing abuse of women.

Smaller communities think violence is not in their backyard or they close their eyes so as not to see and have to get involved. In smaller communities, people know each other, people are related and choose not see the big picture of abuse. People still lack information and reaching out is hard in smaller communities.

Impact:

Community attitudes and lack of family support isolates victims of abuse. Women who live in situations of abuse often feel that they not only have to leave their partner, but their families, and communities as well. They worry about the impact on their children of leaving friends, school and family.

Family and community denial or avoidance of abuse sends a message to the abuser and others, that abuse is tolerated. Abusers are not held accountable and are not supported to end the abuse and seek help.

Questions:

- How can families address abuse, support victims, hold abusers accountable and support abusers?
- How can communities take responsibility for safety of women and children in the community and at home?

Options:

The options include both community level planning and concrete activities.

Planning:

- Educate people on their community responsibility towards all types of violence, including abuse of women, through workshops and sessions on community building partnerships
- Motivate involvement - What can I do for my community?
- Promote, encourage communities to do projects to enhance safe communities, homes, families, no violence allowed; implement a community action plan

Activities:

- Messages on community tv channel.
- Information through schools, including when children are young.
- Drama presentations to schools, police, business organizations, community at large to show what it is really like
- Community forum on violence against women and children.

Recommendation #3 Mechanism to Deal with the Total System and Hold the System Accountable

Issue:

There are many improvements in place in the system. The system works by identifying and correcting mistakes when they happen, individuals whose sensitivity and commitment makes the system work for the victim, faster response time, willingness of system and community to work together to improve system, increased opportunities for dialogue, availability of resources to facilitate dialogue between sectors.

The individual parts of the justice system have improved, however there continue to be problems particularly in relation to the system as a whole. There is no routine monitoring and evaluation, criteria for effective response, mechanism for community and victim feedback, consistent education about the system internally and externally, eg. protocols, roles, mandates, functions.

The term “system” is not clear and needs clarification. Once clarified, is the problem with the “system” or with the bias of individuals? There may be internal barriers preventing appropriate responses.

The system is not user friendly for victims - criminalization of violence results in use of an adversarial system which promotes a winner and a loser. At the same time there is a concern about decriminalizing violence against women that could result in remaking “private”, what many have advocated to become “public”. The victims voice is not heard in the legal system either in criminal court, except as a witness or at sentencing, or in the family court on issues of violence. There are also long waiting periods for a legal outcome in family law areas.

Impact:

The lack of system accountability means women fall through the cracks between parts of the system and have no mechanism for feedback (complaints) when the system does not work. Justice and community interveners may provide feedback to each other about an individual situation, but do not have a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Without feedback processes, interveners are more likely to express their criticism to others and not to the person/organization with whom there is a problem. The system may be unaware of internal barriers.

Questions:

- How can the justice system as a whole be held accountable, beyond protocols for different parts?
- What mechanisms can be put in place for regular monitoring and evaluation of the justice system including community organization and individual feedback?
- How can the desire for a more holistic approach to family and criminal matters be addressed without decriminalizing abuse?
- How can information about the effective working of the justice system be shared with others?

Options:

- Discuss/ reflect on the problems and identify who should be involved in problem-solving
- Consider the role of an ombudsperson and determine if it is a workable option
- Mandate authority for whole system accountability, and develop a process to move information through the whole system.
- Find out from other jurisdictions, what has worked or not
- Include those most affected (women) in the approach.
- Analyze the system - What is effective? Whose criteria? Whose perspective? (need victim perspective) How narrow or broad is “system”? Accountability of system to whom? What about power imbalances in a hierarchical system?
- Address the concern about who a victim can complain to without jeopardizing access to the service
- Exclude from responding to women victims of violence, personnel who are insensitive or lack understanding of family violence and sexual assault or who are abusers themselves

Recommendation #4 Support Victims Financially

Issue:

Women’s economic security is essential to preventing abuse. Women often have to make the impossible choice between abuse and poverty and women don’t report because they know they will subject themselves and children to a lifetime of poverty. For many women who leave abusive relationships the abuse continues through financial abuse, sometimes for many years.

Financial need is not identified as a need by the criminal justice system and women find that nothing works. Abusive partners find creative ways to manage or report finances so that women do not have access to financial resources in the short or longer term. Different levels of government and courts have different criteria for reporting income and assessing costs.

When women are ready for new opportunities there is often a lack of education and training opportunities, and job search help. Opportunities for jobs higher than minimum wage are few. Transportation to education, training and employment is a barrier.

When women need to rely on social assistance, there is a stigma and there is no value given to

social/recreational activities necessary to the health of the children/family. Assistance levels don't allow for healthy choices such as nutrition, housing. Rent ceilings have decreased and low rental housing is either not available or standards are low.

Impact:

Women stay in abusive relationships because of the risk of poverty and the stigma of social assistance. Women continue to be abused financially in their process of leaving a relationship.

Questions:

- How can women be supported financially to leave an abusive relationship?
- How can interim help be provided without the stigma and poverty associated with social assistance?
- How can the justice system address “creative reporting” of finances by abusers?
- How can women be assisted toward economic security?

Options:

At separation:

- when support payments are at issue, assets should be on the table, not just current income and information should be verified by Revenue Canada
- non- payment of support should be considered a debt to be repaid
- have the non-custodial parent held responsible for ‘proportional’ amount of support
- when assets are divided, ensure that the children are accounted for
- provide immediate short term support (without having to go through a major process) to cover childcare, and travel costs while women get help, counselling, and housing and go to court
- provide access to income resources at time of need rather than years down the road

General:

- guaranteed annual income
- programs/groups for training, employment, and support open to women who may not already be on social assistance or employment insurance
- public funding for accessible day care
- input of victims at every stage of program development, policy change.

Guiding Principles

Participants discussed their visions of what was needed and their beliefs about justice options for women as the foundation of priorities. The beliefs that can guide policy and program development include:

- Philosophy of believing the victim vs. onus to prove abuse; victim not the cause of the abuse
- All types of abuse are socially unacceptable at any level
- Women need to perceive interveners as allies, rather than as blaming the victim
- Services must be holistic and based on victim needs; and provide a constant support

- person throughout the process
- Everyone in a helping or intervention role who listens to a woman's story of abuse must be accountable for respectful, sensitive, flexible, appropriate and effective intervention
- Services must be available and accessible
- Women need immediate protection of family finances and access to adequate financial support in order to make safe choices for themselves and their children
- Women who may not have been working outside the home need opportunities for empowerment and employment
- Processes must be transparent so women know what intervention and support can be available through, justice, legal, housing, education, health and social assistance
- Justice interventions need to be holistic - citizens don't separate the justice system into jurisdictions (criminal/family)
- An attitude of let's find a way to meet your needs, rather than "yes, BUT"
- Victims and advocates are included in individual discussions and decisions, and in policy and program decisions
- Women need options and opportunities to make choices
- Marriage contract, relationship agreements must be honoured and not abused.
- Systems are made up of people; when each person values people's rights and equalities then the system will value these too

Related Activities and Resources

There are many related activities and resources that complement and support these recommendations. A comprehensive approach is needed that builds on previous studies and activities.

Response to Woman Abuse: Policy and Protocol Initiative Contact: Kirstin Lund 569-1894

The Woman Abuse Protocol project has worked with three services that intervene with family violence/woman abuse - Hospital Emergency, Income Assistance, Justice. Working groups for each service included staff of the service, survivors of abuse and project representatives to develop protocols. The project is currently raising awareness about the protocols and woman abuse, and developing an evaluation framework. Funded by Status of Women Canada.

Social Marketing Contact: Joanne Ings 894-3354

The Social Marketing project surveyed the attitudes of Islanders about family violence. The project is currently conducting focus groups to better understand prevention messages for specific groups who are at higher risk of abuse. Funded by Community Mobilization Program.

Evaluation - Victims of Family Violence Act Contact: Ellie Reddin 368-4582

The evaluation of the Victims of Family Violence Act will assess what is working to support victims of family violence and areas that can be improved. This is the first full evaluation of the program. A monitoring study of Emergency Protection Orders was done in 1999. Funded by

Family Legal Aid

Contact: Andy Lou Somers 436-9856

The Family Legal Aid project interviewed victims of family violence about their need for and experiences with legal aid, surveyed legal aid services across Canada, and brought groups and individuals together to better understand needs, gaps and options. Funded by Status of Women

Zero Tolerance

Contact: Andy Lou Somers 436-9856

This new project will create a strategic plan to work collaboratively towards achieving policy and legislative changes for stiffer and more severe sentencing in cases of assault against women and children. A working committee and consultation process will develop recommendations to address policy changes. Funded by Status of Women.

Circle of Prevention

Contact: Julie Devon Dodd 628-8187

The Circle of Prevention is an Atlantic network that includes representatives of provincial shelter organizations, provincial government, Atlantic programs, Black and Aboriginal women. A two-year project funded by Health Canada is now an ongoing network for the purpose of learning across provinces and sectors and developing Atlantic wide approaches. The Circle of Prevention will be addressing economic barriers to woman leaving abuse relationships through a project - Assessing Abused Women's Choices: Poverty or Violence.

Sexual Abuse Needs Assessment

Contact: Lorna Hutcheson 566-1864

The Rape Crisis Centre surveyed victims of sexual abuse and service providers across the province to determine how to best meet the needs of survivors of sexual abuse who live outside the Charlottetown area or who face other barriers to accessing services.

Family Law Section

Contact: Bennett Campbell 368-6398

This initiative is following up on the Norman Ross study of Court Services with specific emphasis on approaches to family law that would better meet people's needs during family breakdown.

Workplace

Contact: Sandy Bentley 368-5557

This project will provide awareness and education about the impact of domestic violence and violence in the workplace to organizations and business. Occupational Health and Safety is a partner in the project.

Roundtable on Victim Issues

Contact: Ellie Reddin 368-4582

The Victim Services Advisory Committee and the Policy Centre for Victim Issues (Justice Canada) hosted a Roundtable on Victim Issues in Charlottetown in October 2000. A report of the Roundtable and recommendations is available.

Family Violence and the Justice System Response:

Contact Ellie Reddin 368-4582

A Report to the Attorney General of Prince Edward Island by Anne Nicholson for the Victim Services Advisory Committee, March 2000 that identified improvements needed to the justice system response for victims of family violence in Prince Edward Island.

Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team

Kirstin Lund, 569-1894

This research team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research conducted interviews with 22 women survivors of family violence. The results of the research, including the women's stories, can be found in a report and Facilitator's Kit with handouts, overheads and case scenarios to assist those working in the area of family violence prevention to further their work and educate others.

Conclusions

The Justice Options for Women project documented the perspectives, needs and ideas of women who are victims of violence and those who work in the community and government to address violence against women.

Together, all participants identified four priorities. The challenge is for those with authority for policies and programs, and those with commitment to preventing violence against women to continue working together with women so that women who have been abused or assaulted can reach out for help, be respected and supported, be safe, and begin healing toward well-being.