

Media Advisory
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Statistics Canada Report Leaves Questions Unanswered

Toronto, ON – October 3, 2006 –

A major report released by Statistics Canada yesterday, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*, leaves many important questions unanswered.

The report, which pulls together data about violence against women from victimization surveys, police services, courts, and service agencies, shows that women are more likely than men to be victim of the most severe forms of spousal assault. As well, it demonstrates that women living in the most remote regions of Canada experience higher rates of spousal assault, sexual assault, and homicide. Aboriginal women were also found to experience higher rates of spousal violence. These conclusions are not surprising to those who work with women – they affirm that gendered violence is a serious problem in Canada, and women who experience various forms of isolation are most vulnerable to violence.

However, the report also states that spousal homicide rates have declined between 1975 and 2004. Wendy Komiotis questions the reasons behind this trend and explanations provided in the report for it. She is Executive Director of the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), a community-based organization that works to prevent and end violence against women, youth, and children. Komiotis says: “There are counter-explanations for this apparent drop in homicide rates, which run counter to some reasons given in the Statistics Canada report. They include the idea that women might not be leaving violent relationships due to fear or economic hardship for themselves and their children.” Research reveals that the risk of a woman being killed by her abusive partner increases dramatically when she leaves the relationship.

Other reasons for an apparent decrease in spousal homicide could be due to non-reporting of women who do not speak English or French. “The report doesn’t capture experiences of these women, because it only collects data from those who are able to answer in Canada’s official languages,” Wendy explains. The report estimates that 2.6 million women do not speak English or French.

Continual underreporting of sexual assault and an increase in reported rates of criminal harassment (stalking) revealed by the report demonstrate that there are still huge barriers to reporting rape for women and that violence against women is still a serious problem. As existing evidence shows, stalking and similar offences are ‘stepping stone’ behaviours that can escalate to crimes such as physical assault and murder. “The reported drop in spousal homicide doesn’t reflect that work on violence against women is over or that the women who experience violence are any better off economically and socially. We still need to challenge gender-based violence as a systemic issue and a community crisis throughout Canada.”

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