

Why safety for women and marginalized groups?

At METRAC, we understand that certain groups in society that are more vulnerable to violence than others. Women are such a group. Statistics show that violence against women and violence against marginalized groups is generally a problem around the world. It manifests itself differently depending on the social context, but it's a widespread reality in Canada and beyond.

METRAC believes that **true safety is the freedom to move around without facing intimidation, physical harm and fear of violence, crime or harassment.** It includes a sense of belonging and acceptance by frequent users of any space.

It is a well-known fact that women and girls are at a higher risk of experiencing violence and abuse in our society. The fear that many women feel is a response to the threat and reality of violence in their lives. Women can experience violence in the privacy of their homes as well as in public spaces such as neighborhoods, workplaces, community facilities and places of study and worship. Not all women are the same. Some are more vulnerable and feel more fear because of the discrimination they face as, for example, young women, Aboriginal women, racialized women, immigrant and refugee women, a member of LGBTTIQQ2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, questioning and two-spirit) communities, low income women, Deaf women and women with disabilities. Research shows that these women have a greater risk of violence.

METRAC works to make public spaces safer for women, youth and children and other socially marginalized groups. Once spaces are made safer for the most vulnerable members of society, they will be safer for everyone. While other areas of safety exist, such as traffic safety, occupational health and safety from hazardous substances, METRAC focuses on enhancing peoples' safety from violence, discrimination and harassment.

Why Women's Safety?

Violence affects all kinds of people. But too often, the face of the victimized is a woman's. While most violence occurs between people who know each other and women are most often assaulted by men they know and trust, the impact of public and private forms of violence on one's sense of safety is immense. Fear of violence makes women feel unsafe and women feel particularly vulnerable to public violence. Unfortunately, their fears and unique concerns are often ignored. Fear of violence can affect what women choose to wear, where they go, whom they go with and how they travel. It limits women's choices on a day-to-day basis. Here are some Canadian statistics on violence against women:

Women are more likely to be harassed at work than men. The harassment includes leers, name-calling and sexual assault. Victims of harassment may lose their jobs or have poor relationships with co-workers. Many women do not report being harassed. They fear losing their jobs, that reporting will make things worst or that no one will believe them (Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 2004, *Workplace Harassment and Violence*).

Women are mainly the victims of violence in the home. Some 23% of women who experienced violence were beaten, choked or threatened with a gun or had a knife used against them by a partner. Younger women between 15 and 24 years are more likely to face violence from their partners (Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*).

Young girls are most likely to be the victims of sexual assaults. In 2000, the majority (54%) of female victims of sexual assault were less than 18 years old. 20% of the victims were children who under 12 years of age (Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. 2001. *Canadian Crime Statistics 2000*. Catalogue 85-205).

About a quarter of women students are physically or sexually assaulted by a male date or boyfriend. A fifth of the male students felt that the forced sex was alright “if he spends money on her”, “if he is stoned or drunk” or “if they had been dating for a long time” (H. Johnson, 1996, *Dangerous Domains: Violence against Women in Canada*, p.115-120).

At least 582 Aboriginal women in Canada have been murdered or are missing and feared dead over the past 2 decades (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2010, *What Their Stories Tell Us: Research findings from the Sisters in Spirit Initiative*).

Women of colour may be more vulnerable to sexual assault because of racist sexual stereotypes, and these stereotypes on the part of the police and the courts mean they may have less access to justice (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2002, *Factsheet: Women’s Experience of Racism: How Race and Gender Interact*).

Women are afraid of being out at night. 58% of women feel worried while waiting or using public transit alone after dark, and 16% felt unsafe walking alone after dark. Only about a third (29%) of men share the same worry (Statistics Canada, 2006, *Measuring Violence Against Women, Statistical Trends 2006*).

Women are afraid of being home alone at night. About one-third (27%) felt worried when they are home alone in the evenings. Some 12% of men have the same worries (Statistics Canada, 2006, *Measuring Violence Against Women, Statistical Trends 2006*).

Sexual assault is the least likely kind of victimization to be reported. Only 8% of sexual assaults are reported to police (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Why the Safety of Other Marginalized Communities?

Peoples’ attitudes and behaviours affect how comfortable and safe others feel around them. They are part of the social environment of an area. The social environment and attitudes and behaviours within them reflect power relationships in society. This means that people who have less power in society (i.e. women, children, seniors, people with disabilities) the community, and their families are more likely to be victims of public violence.

Power is also connected to our personal identities and people have different safety concerns based on their identities. For instance, hate crimes happen when marginalized groups get targeted because of things like their religion, race or sexual orientation. Hate crimes end up hurting the entire community that the victim is a part of because they create a climate of fear, discrimination and violence. Here are some statistics on how violence affects different marginalized groups in public spaces.

Aboriginal people: Aboriginal people are three times more likely to become victims of violence than non-Aboriginal people (Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, November 24, 2005, “General Social Survey: Criminal Victimization”).

Race: Racialized people make up 13% of Canada’s population and are the victims of 57% of all hate crimes. They are twice as worried as other Canadians about becoming victims. Black communities and South Asian communities are most frequently targeted in hate crimes that are motivated by race or ethnicity. About half of these hate crimes used violence, including assault and uttering threats, harassment, and robbery (Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, June 1, 2004, “Pilot Survey of Hate Crimes”).

Gay and lesbian communities: People who are gay and lesbian are about three times more likely to be victims of violence than straight people (Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, November 24, 2005, “General Social Survey: Criminal Victimization”; Statistics Canada, 2001, Centre for Justice Statistics, *Hate Crime in Canada: An Overview of Issues and Data Sources*).

Transpeople: Public violence against transsexual and transgendered people can be brutal. According to the organizers of the Remembering Our Dead project, an average of two people per month are reported dead due to anti-trans violence in North America. The violence is worst for those transitioning from male-to-female (Currah, P. and Minter, S., 2000, *Transgender Equality: A Handbook for Activists and Policymakers*, New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force).

Youth: Children and youth are very vulnerable to sexual assault, particularly girls and young women. Six out of every ten sexual assaults reported to police involved a child or youth (Statistics Canada, 2003).