

youth violence & gender **on the agenda**



Fall 2007 Bi-annual Newsletter



**Metropolitan Action Committee on
Violence Against Women and Children**

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About METRAC

Since 1984, the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) has pursued its mandate to build the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to prevent and respond effectively to the issue of violence towards diverse women and children. Our mission has been undertaken through public education and training, safety initiatives, partnerships, research, and policy in three (3) program areas: Community Outreach and Education, Community Safety, and Community Justice.

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Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director

I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the colours of autumn, as well as the last days of the fall season. Once again METRAC is taking this opportunity to keep you informed of new projects, special events, and of course, current issues of violence affecting women and children, which desperately need attention and action. For this edition, we have chosen to focus on the issue of youth violence and gender. We hope our message will provide a catalyst for people to act for change within their own sphere of influence.

In recent years, we have witnessed several incidents of violence within educational institutions across our city, province, and country. Media reports of these shootings, stabbings, and sexual assaults tend to describe them in generic terms, such as “teen violence”, “youth violence”, “school assaults”, and

“assaults”, often ignoring that boys and young men commit the majority of these violent crimes. Similarly, media reports tend not to notice the fact that girls and young women make up the majority of victims of



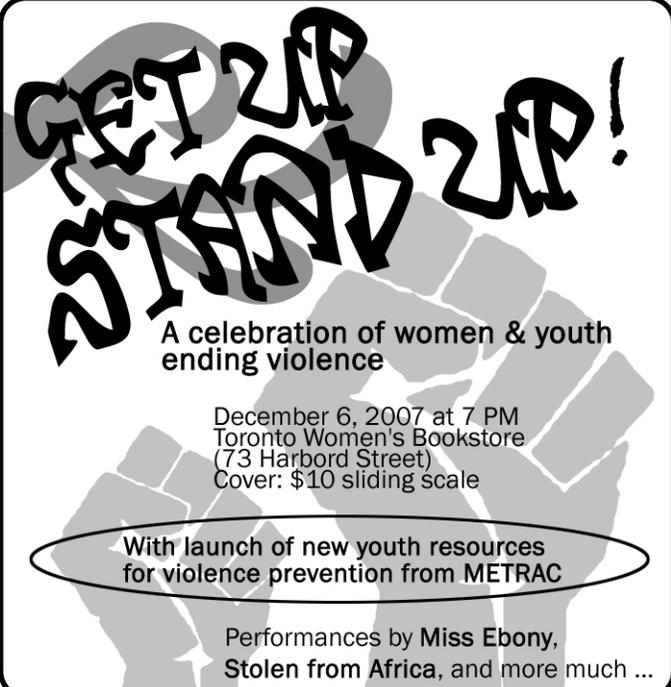
Launch of RePlay: Finding Zoe video game and related prevention projects from partnering organizations, with the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Sandra Pupatello

sexual violence in educational institutions. This is not to say that boys and men are naturally violent. Obviously, not all boys and young men shoot, stab, or rape their peers. My point is to identify "masculinity" as one of the complex cultural forces behind these incidents of violence.

Confronting dominant masculinity and its link to violence means taking a critical look at how boys are socialized

Confronting the issue of masculinity and its link to violence would mean taking a critical look at how boys are socialized to deny and repress feelings of hurt and sadness, while it is considered acceptable for them to show aggression and physical force as the surest way to assert their power and exercise control over others. In our daily work, we know that women and girls often bear the brunt of violent masculinity, through verbal, physical, sexual, and emotional assault from men they know and love. Although not all boys and young men respond to the pressures of masculinity by becoming violent, Michael Kimmel suggests that in many cases, boys learn any number of coping strategies to deal with the harsh demands of rigid sex roles. Some may turn inward, self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, join gangs, become loners, or may even commit suicide.

What can be done to bring an end to the constricting gender rules, which often result in high levels of male



**GET UP
STAND UP!**

A celebration of women & youth
ending violence

December 6, 2007 at 7 PM
Toronto Women's Bookstore
(73 Harbord Street)
Cover: \$10 sliding scale

With launch of new youth resources
for violence prevention from METRAC

Performances by Miss Ebony,
Stolen from Africa, and more much ...

violence towards women and girls as well as male-on-male violence? While there is no quick singular fix for ending violent masculinity, one place to start is to find alternatives to the rigid sex roles imposed upon boys and girls. A proactive, multilevel approach must be taken to produce new rules and roles based upon non-violence, respect, and equity in all relationships, and within all institutions and systems, including parenting, play, education, the media, and sports.

Until we return with our Spring 2008 edition, the board and staff of METRAC extend best wishes to our many friends, funders, and community partners. May the New Year be one of peace and happiness for all.



We need YOU to be Bowlers and Team Captains to support our youth violence prevention program!

\$20,000 goal!

Bowling 4 Change

**Saturday November 24, 2007
4 to 6 PM, Bowlerama West
(5429 Dundas Street W, at Kipling Stn.)**

React
respect in action
youth preventing violence

For more info, visit www.metrac.org, call 416-392-4760, email outreach@metrac.org

Youth Violence & Gender-Based Violence

Andrea Gunraj, Outreach Manager

Youth violence is a tragic reality in our society. We often see it on the news - and research shows that youth are in fact at higher risk of experiencing violence than adults. But what is discussed less often is the experience of girls and young women. Youth violence is usually assumed to occur between and against young men, and common law enforcement, city-based, and community-based solutions and policies don't often recognize how diverse young women experience violence themselves.

Young women receive less urgent attention in discussions of youth violence

Half of all Canadian women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, and younger women are more at risk of abuse, including stalking, sexual assault, and murder (Statistics Canada, 2006, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends*). These shocking facts are often invisible to the public - girls and women are most often abused by men they know and trust, and it often occurs in private spaces (Statistics Canada, 2006, *Family Violence in Canada*). Violence that women experience is regularly assumed to be "none of our business" and a private matter "between him and her". It's rarely taken as seriously as it should be. No doubt, violence against younger women is even less recognized by the public because young women have even less power and rights than adult women, as a result of their age and their gender status. Their experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse thus receive much less urgent attention in societal discussions of youth violence.

But the more media-worthy public violence involving young men certainly impacts young women too. It affects their feelings of safety and freedom in their neighbourhoods, and the young men involved are friends, brothers, sons, family members, or partners of young women. Marginalized young women's needs for support and services are directly interrelated with those of young men - they too need recreation, job support, skill development, violence prevention support, social assistance, settlement and counselling services, and affordable housing, that are all tailored to engage them and respond to what they go through.

We cannot ignore how common stereotypes about what it means to be a "real man" and a "real woman" also connect to youth violence. Common gender ideals about women and men that are taught from a young age are a root cause of gender-based violence and can lead to abusive interpersonal dynamics. But ideas about "true" masculinity are also a root cause of male-on-male violence - the idea that a "real man" must be in control by any means necessary can lead to violent situations between men, too. It's all the more terrible for marginalized young men, those who have less access to more socially acceptable means of gaining control and becoming financially successful, who experience a combination of barriers and disrespect due to racism, poverty, and disenfranchisement.

All forms of violence are related to each other because they are all means of gaining power. As such, gender issues and violence against young women must be recognized as important elements of "youth violence"; only then can effective, holistic solutions to this problem be developed.

Focus on ReAct Male Youth Facilitators

Alana Lowe, ReAct Coordinator

You'll never catch them without their *Stolen From Africa* t-shirts, and Youth Peer Facilitators Logikal Ethics (Neil Donaldson) and Unknown Mizery (Sourav Deb) bring the same dedication they have for their tees to METRAC's Respect In Action (ReAct) youth violence

prevention program. Logikal and Mizery are the co-founders of Mutescreamz Mentaltainment and the *Stolen From Africa* movement, a creative initiative that promotes cultural and historical awareness through education, fashion, music, and the arts. Aside from

creating thought-provoking political t-shirts, the duo use their self-produced music and hip hop culture to connect with young people from all walks of life and help them better understand their place in their communities, society, and history (for more information, visit stolenfromafrica.com).

“From a male perspective, it’s important for me to be a ReAct Facilitator because we live in a male dominant society,” says Logikal. “And I recognize that privilege, me being a male in this society.” It’s the privilege associated with being a man in a world that does not treat women and men equally that makes male ally Peer Facilitators like Logikal and Mizery so important to preventing gender-based violence against diverse women and youth and promoting healthy relationships.

Since the messages come from young male mouths to young male minds, Logikal and Mizery’s work resonates with young men they lead workshops with

and train. In addition to inspiring and encouraging youth participants to be more aware about issues of

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violence and gender-based violence, they also inspire youth to become part of the solution. “I feel like I’m doing something good,” Logikal explains, “because violence against women and girls is a topic that needs to be dealt with. A lot of youth are being violent toward women and other youth without even knowing it. Talking to them about violence is empowering to them, just as much as it is empowering for me.”

School Community Safety Advisory Panel

Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director

On August 11, METRAC gave a presentation to the School Community Safety Advisory Panel in response to reports of alleged sexual assaults in Toronto schools that had targeted girls from specific communities. Our presentation acknowledged the pervasive problem of sexual violence in schools that daily degrades and threatens young women as they navigate the school system. We expressed concern that, although a study conducted in 1994 by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF) reported that over 80% of the more than 150 young women surveyed had been sexually harassed by other students, not much has changed, more than ten years later.

**Young women may not
report sexual assault for fear
that they or their
communities will be blamed**

METRAC critiqued the way in which stories of the alleged sexual assaults tended to blame young women and their communities for not reporting the incident,

and for not holding the perpetrators accountable for their actions. We pointed out that while it is important for perpetrators to be held accountable, responses to sexual violence that pressure young women to report to the police can be problematic. Many young women who have been sexually assaulted often fear their stories will be dismissed or that they will be re-victimized by the legal system. It is precisely because young women may fear being blamed and/or fear that their communities will be blamed that they may not report assaults.

We highlighted the double jeopardy for young women of diverse races, sexualities, gender identities, disabilities, and class backgrounds and how their situation is compounded by inequitable treatment within society. For example, the credibility of young women with disabilities is often questioned when they report sexual assault, particularly in cases of women with developmental or learning disabilities, or those with psychiatric diagnoses. Yet we know that girls with disabilities experience higher rates of sexual abuse (4 times the national average). Afraid to report the abuse because of the fear of not being believed, many of

these girls continue to lead lives filled with threats and actual incidents of violence.

A point worth noting is the discouraging record of reported sexual assaults resolved through the criminal justice system. According to Statistics Canada, only 6% of sexual assaults are reported to police and of these reports, only 40% result in charges being laid; where charges are laid, only two-thirds of cases result in a conviction.

METRAC made five (5) recommendations to the panel to address the issue of sexual violence against young women within the school system. In short, they were:

1. Violence prevention education tailored for educators and students.
2. Inter-ministry communication between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry Responsible for Women's Issues to share expertise, strategies, and resources.
3. Policies to address equality rights of young women, including their right to a safe learning environment.
4. Partnerships between schools and community agencies working with women experiencing violence.
5. Safety Audits to be conducted in all schools to examine physical features, attitudes and behaviours, and practices and policies from a gender-based, equity-focussed perspective.

Nine Heavens Healing Retreat Project

METRAC participated in a partnership with the Nine Heavens Healing Academy of Rockton, Ontario, funded by the Toronto Police Service. The Project provided a retreat and personal development program with violence prevention activities for young men during the summer. Thirty (30) young men from the Jane and Finch community attended the program, located in a safe and secure country setting.

During the sessions, youth communicated their internal disputes and worked to develop personal qualities of self-worth, honour, purpose, self-esteem, respect,

self-respect, and empathy. The program offered practical tools and problem-solving techniques to deal with some of the risk factors for violence amongst youth. The program's modules placed emphasis on mentorship, responsibility, and life skills, combined with the opportunity to explore and engage with nature in different ways. By engaging youth in various experiences connected to mother earth, including agriculture/horticulture, conservation/preservation, and outdoor education/recreation, they learned about some of the gifts of healing offered by nature.

International Partners in Women's Rights

Amelie Roy, Canadian Crossroads International

Canadian Crossroads International (CCI) is an international cooperation organization that facilitates



Demonstration by CCI partner, Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, protesting gender-based violence (courtesy of CCI)

partnerships between like-minded organizations from the global South and Canada to promote women's rights from a global perspective. CCI is extremely pleased to be entering a new partnership with METRAC and WiLDAF-Ghana (Women in Law and Development in Africa). WiLDAF is a pan-African network active in 31 African countries that has been committed to the protection and promotion of women's rights since 1990. In Ghana, WiLDAF's vision is to create an organization that helps to engage the Ghanaian government and civil society in the full respect of women's rights. We are looking forward to the mutual learning, common action and solidarity that will come from our partnership.

METRAC - WiLDAF Partnership

Divya Thakore, Human Right Materials Developer, Canadian Crossroads International

I am writing this article at the end of three extremely interesting days spent getting to know the wonderful staff and the amazing work done at METRAC. I have recently been hired by the Canadian Crossroads International (CCI) to facilitate the international partnership between Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) and METRAC.

Members of the Ghanaian chapter of WiLDAF visited METRAC earlier this year and has since been particularly interested in the work done by METRAC's Community Justice Program. I have spent time with the Legal Program Director Clara Ho, getting to know METRAC's legal work so as to be able to facilitate this idea-sharing process within a Ghanaian lens of development.

With that in mind, I have also spoken with METRAC staff in the Community Safety Program and Community Outreach and Education Program. I developed an idea of their work and the challenges they face in the hopes of finding appropriate tools used at WiLDAF that could be adapted and applied here in Toronto.

I am extremely excited to see how this partnership develops and will surely be in touch with updates on the project's progress once I am on the ground and working with the amazing women at WiLDAF in Ghana.

Please stay tuned for upcoming information about this exciting international partnership to enhance women's rights around the world.

Women's Access to Justice Project

Clara Ho, Legal Director

It was a busy summer for METRAC's Justice Program. In addition to our legal information training and policy work, we are far into our project (funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario) to increase access to justice for diverse women experiencing violence. In this fifth project phase, we will focus on the needs of some very disparate communities of women. We will be developing and reproducing legal information materials for Aboriginal women experiencing violence, criminalized and imprisoned women, and women experiencing various forms of workplace violence including, but not limited to, sexual harassment.

The greatest challenge in this project is deciding upon the content of legal information materials for these vulnerable communities of women. The different topics we could focus on seem endless because of a great dearth of available culturally appropriate, language-specific materials which are aimed at women and written from a feminist, anti-oppressive perspective. The Justice Program is working closely with researchers and facilitators to engage women from these diverse communities to get a clearer sense of what the content of the information materials should



Spirit Wind performs at METRAC's Annual General Meeting (June 7), prior to an informative panel discussion on violence against Aboriginal women

be, to best meet their needs. We also hope to explore a variety of formats for information delivery to move beyond the traditional written train-the-trainer kits, pamphlets, and brochures. The Justice Program already produces a CD-ROM that includes all of our information materials, and in keeping with METRAC's general desire to "go green" and increase accessibility, we hope to rely less and less upon paper materials.

Women's Safety: UN Habitat Conference

Iris Samson, Placement Student interviews Narina Nagra, Safety Director

In October, Narina Nagra attended the UN Habitat's International Conference on the State of Safety in World Cities in Mexico. Women's safety audits are an integral part of the UN Habitat's Safer Cities Programme and METRAC attended the conference as a partner agency. International delegates and local Mexican and Latin American community groups attended. The conference included plenary sessions, workshops, thematic dialogues, and award ceremonies. It also launched the *Safer Cities Strategic Plan 2008-2013* and the *UN Habitat's Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*. Narina participated in a safety audit panel on international guidelines and local experiences, the thematic dialogue on Urban Safety in Investment, Slum Upgrading, and Urban Renewal, and the Safer Cities Partners Consultative Group Meeting.



Conference centre in Monterrey, Mexico

Q: How do other cities conduct safety audits?

A: In some European cities, safety audits are an integral part of local governance with staff and resources allocated at the municipal level. In developing cities such as Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), audits focus on women and tend to be part of a larger community safety project, such as the Safer Spaces and Street Campaign, a UN Habitat initiative. In Nairobi, a park was audited and transitioned into a garden with the goal of enhancing safety and social cohesion. The project had multiple actors, including the local government, national government, NGOs, community groups, and the private sector. In Tanzania, social, commercial, cultural, and environmental components are addressed at the

national level of government as well. The process of organizing a group and conducting an audit are quite similar across the world. The difference is that most other audits are project-specific, but METRAC's audit focuses on the lived experience of women and children in diverse communities.

Q: What are some big ideas you learned?

A: Being able to network internationally was amazing, particularly learning how METRAC's approach to safety is similar to global governments and local communities. Recognizing that our audit tool is used in Africa, Latin America, and Mexico showed me how important our work is to women and children everywhere. I gathered information so we can learn from grassroots women's groups and governments, and gain momentum to integrate METRAC's work in the City of Toronto in a sustainable, long-term way.

Q: Were other audits inclusive of women of colour, LBGTQ people, youth, and other marginalized groups? Did they include components on social aspects of safety, such as discrimination and harassment?

A: A holistic analysis was present in the majority of discussions and it was acknowledged that safety audits are an essential component of urban city planning. Furthermore, there was a recognition that women and youth are typically the most vulnerable in society and that poverty is a compounding factor. I learned that our audit's social survey has a unique analysis of discrimination issues, although victimization surveys and one-to-one discussions with women are taking place globally.



South Asian Women's Centre Safety Audit participants

Outreach: Focus on Youth

Andrea Gunraj, Outreach Manager

METRAC's Outreach and Education Program has demonstrated that raising awareness to prevent gender-based violence against youth can be creative. In June, we released our special online video game, entitled *RePlay: Finding Zoe*, and accompanying resources for teachers, parents/guardians, and youth (funded by the Government of Ontario, and developed in partnership with Take Action Games and the White Ribbon Campaign, the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, and Springtide Resources). It has already been played hundreds of times and has generated keen public interest. We are promoting RePlay in a number of traditional and new media venues and are currently working in partnership to create a culturally appropriate French language version of the game.

Our Respect in Action (ReAct) youth violence prevention program continues to deliver interactive, media-savvy, peer-to-peer workshops, trainings, and speaking engagements throughout the city and beyond. ReAct was recently given funding by the Canadian Women's Foundation to start the Youth Alliance Project. This project will bring youth leaders together to build civic engagement and learn political skills in

order to put the needs and experiences of young women on the city and public agenda. The Youth Alliance Project is a much-needed initiative at a time when youth violence issues in Toronto are rarely seen as including girls and young women - it will help their voices to finally be heard loud and clear.

The Outreach Program has just released a number of stellar written resources in easy-to-read formats, focused on youth, children, and women. These include multi-lingual bookmarks listing important services, and colourful, hip, youth-friendly wallet cards, zines, and booklets, on a number of topics. Please visit our Publications Page at www.metrac.org for more information.

Finally, we have been involved in various events and featured in several media initiatives; for example, we were interviewed by some of Canada's major newspapers and we spoke on City TV's *City Online* show on the topic of violence against women. The Outreach Program was also involved in consultations with the School Community Safety Advisory Panel to address concerns arising from the death of Jordan Manners on May 23 (schoolsafetypanel.com).

Recent Community Events

Iris Samson, Placement Student

On October 16, METRAC attended a panel event, *Through the Looking Glass: An Examination of Racial Profiling in Canada*. Panelists discussed racial profiling in communities, at our country's borders, and in law enforcement contexts, as well as the role of the government, policing, and anti-terrorism initiatives. We also attended the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund's Persons Day Breakfast on October 19, based on the 1929 decision for women to be seen as persons under Canadian law. The panel discussion tackled issues such as the relevance of academic feminism to lived experiences of women, and the meaning of the term feminist, and it highlighted recent victories and challenges for diverse women.



Lerners Balancing the Scales: fundraiser (May 2007) at SPIN Gallery, featuring music from Farheen Beg and dj vashti

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Staff, Board, Volunteers, Interns, Donors, & Partners

We extend our thanks to METRAC's dedicated staff, board, volunteers, and interns. Thank you to departing staff members Farheen Beg and Suzanne Methot, as well as departing ReAct Peer Facilitators and volunteers for their hard work. METRAC would also like to thank our community partners, including organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women, youth, and children. Finally, we extend sincere thanks to individual and anonymous donors who have contributed to METRAC over the past year - we could not survive without your

METRAC is "going green": in 2008, METRAC hopes to transition to an online/email newsletter format to benefit the environment and produce less waste. Printed copies of newsletters will be still be available to people who do not have internet access.