



BC Association of
Specialized Victim
Assistance &
Counselling Programs



B.C./Yukon
Society of Transition
Houses



BC Institute
Against Family Violence

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

ISSUE: Third Party Reporting in Cases of Sexual Assault

In response to a series of aggravated sexual assaults and deaths that relate to Robert William Pickton, Donald Bakker and Highway 16, a coordinated provincial approach to third party reporting in cases of sexual assault is being developed to maximize public safety.

KEY POINTS

- In 2002, 27,094 sexual offences were reported to police in Canada (Kong et al 2003), most of these involving women as the victims (Gannon and Mihorean 2005).
- Prostitutes are more at risk of violence and homicide than the general population and their cases are less likely to be solved. Sixty-six percent of 50 homicides in the context of prostitution between 1991 and 2001 in Canada were solved, compared to 79% for homicides overall (Kong et al 2003).
- Sexual assault is the most under-reported violent crime in the Canadian General Social Survey on Victimization. Despite efforts to improve justice system responses to sexual assault, the reporting rate is declining; only 8% of sexual assaults were reported to police in 2004, a significant drop from 1999 (Gannon and Mihorean 2005). Reporting rates are almost certainly even lower for marginalized women such as immigrant women, sex trade workers and women who are street involved. Sexual offences are also less likely than other violent offences to result in charges against a suspect and adults charged with sexual offences are less likely than other violent offenders to be found guilty (Kong et al 2003).
- A new initiative to develop a provincial approach to third party reporting for sexual offences is currently underway. The initiative involves the Community Coordination for Women's Safety Program—funded by the Ministry of Community Services—and representatives from RCMP E Division Investigative Standards Unit, BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police, Vancouver Police Department Sex Crimes Unit and Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.
- Third party reporting allows victims to pass on to police via a third party (a victim support service) information about sexual crimes committed against them, in a way that feels “safe” to them and provides an opportunity that may lead to a victim making a formal police report.
- Third party reports allow police to review information, look for and evaluate trends, create profiles of assailants and/or take other actions such as instituting patrols in the areas. Police can contact agencies collecting third party reports if they wish to follow up with victims, but the decision to give a full report rests with victims.
- Benefits of a standardized system for third party reporting of sexual assault include:

- Police access to intelligence information that they would otherwise not have
- Province-wide police sharing of information about sexual predators
- Facilitating the tracking of transient and serial sexual predators
- Potential earlier identification of serial predators
- Supporting local efforts to establish protocols to facilitate third party reports
- Facilitating a consistent, effective response to both reports and victims
- Facilitating interagency cooperation and learning
- An effective system to receive third party reports may result in increased direct reporting of sexual assault to police. An effective system for processing third party reports and sharing information will improve opportunities for solving these crimes. Higher reporting and clearance rates may result in a reduction in crime.

THE CONTEXT

- Women's reasons for reluctance to report sexual assault include fear of retaliation by the assailant, fear they will not be believed, fear or mistrust of police or courts, feelings of humiliation or shame, language barriers, or cultural taboos.
- Only three policing jurisdictions in BC have policies in place for receiving third party reports and there is no standardized model for accepting, processing and utilizing the reports and sharing the information with other jurisdictions.
- This means that critical information about sexual predators is not being collected or shared province-wide and identification of trends or transient or serial sexual predators is greatly hampered.
- Third party reports would be used only as a last resort for victims who would not otherwise approach the justice system.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- The coordinated provincial approach to third party reporting of sexual offences that is being developed should be supported by relevant ministries to include:
 - A standardized method of gathering the information, entering the information into a province-wide information system (PRIME), processing the reports and ensuring the information is accessible to all police jurisdictions
 - Community-Based Victim Service programs to accept and process these reports
 - Training for those responsible for accepting or processing the reports

CONTACT: Tracy Porteous, Executive Director
BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs
Telephone: 604-633-2506
Email: porteous@endingviolence.org

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