



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: Prevention of Violence Against Women

There are inseparable links between intervention and prevention to address violence against women. Given the key role played by victim support services in both intervention and prevention, it is crucial that: 1) the important role front-line programs play in prevention is acknowledged, 2) these services be funded to carry out important prevention work and 3) any provincial prevention initiatives involve local victim support agencies.

KEY POINTS

- It is important to look not only at traditional concepts of violence prevention, such as school-based projects and public education campaigns, but also at how intervention services actually prevent further violence. The “prevention lens” that separates intervention from prevention does not acknowledge the many ways that intervention programs work to prevent violence. At its most basic level, because of the recurring nature of domestic and sexual violence, effective early intervention serves a powerful secondary prevention function by stopping violence from recurring.
- One of the main definitions of primary prevention is that it works to change the attitudes, values, behaviours and social conditions that allow violence to occur. Some of the social conditions that allow violence to occur include poverty, privilege, abuse of power imbalances, sexism, racism, discrimination based on ability, victim blaming and the silence surrounding violence.
- We know that women who are marginalized by race, immigration, poverty, sexual orientation or ability are more at risk of serious violence. Therefore, it is important that prevention programs work to change the social conditions that allow this serious violence to occur and to continue.
- Cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration at the provincial and local levels is particularly important to incorporate into prevention and intervention initiatives in order to have the most effective preventive impact. Coordination and collaboration will help ensure that all the response systems are focused on the social determinants of safety and working together to create strong communities that do not condone violence against women.
- One of the areas where intervention and prevention clearly overlap is in programs dealing with children and youth. Any program that can help children or youth deal with the impact of victimization or of witnessing violence will reduce the chances that experiencing or witnessing violence will result in young people repeating the pattern by becoming abusers or victims. Child and youth intervention programs, therefore, are powerful tools for prevention.

THE CONTEXT

- Victim support programs all across BC are working every day to change the attitudes, values, behaviours and social conditions that allow violence to occur.
- In addition, some examples of effective prevention projects include:
 - Project Respect in Victoria is a prevention program for youth ages 14 to 19, in partnership with secondary schools, that aims to prevent sexual violence, particularly date rape, by challenging the factors that lead to sexual violence: stereotypes, labels, miscommunication, drugs and alcohol, media pressure and power imbalance.
 - Violence is Preventable (VIP) is a schools-based partnership among the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, Children Who Witness Abuse programs and local schools to offer presentations on domestic violence and in-depth group intervention for children and youth who have been exposed to domestic violence. Currently 28 schools across BC are engaged in the VIP initiative, which is funded by the Ministry of Community Services.
 - The Women and Violence: Education is Prevention project of the SaltSpring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse (SWOVA) program is a K-12 school-wide approach to dating violence, sexual harassment and bullying that has been offered using classroom and large-group workshops and other activities in partnership with community agencies. The aim is to create a culture that does not condone violence and to help students learn values and skills that will prevent violence against girls and women.
 - *The Person Within* is a video and training guide produced by the BC Institute Against Family Violence about preventing the abuse of children and youth with disabilities.
 - Our Women Our Strength: Addressing Violence in Aboriginal Communities was a community-based prevention program of the Pacific Association of First Nations Women, providing education and support to aboriginal women living on reserve or in remote areas of BC. The project aimed to increase aboriginal women's safety by building capacity in rural and isolated northern communities to respond proactively to issues of violence against women and addressing root causes of that violence. The program, funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, was designed and delivered by trained aboriginal women and men, elders and community workers. This important initiative is no longer funded.
 - A series of educational videos on domestic violence, child abuse and senior abuse, in Punjabi, Mandarin, Cantonese and Spanish was recently produced by Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services to raise awareness in the South Asian, Chinese and Latin American communities. A province-wide tour is planned that will use these videos to present workshops and connect women with service providers.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Funding should be provided to local victim support programs to provide prevention education in their communities and their ministry contracts should reflect this important role.

- Any provincial anti-violence campaign should include consultation with provincial organizations representing front-line victim support programs.
- Funding should be provided to programs such as VIP, SWOVA, Victoria's Project Respect and Our Women Our Strength on an ongoing basis, as well as to one-time prevention projects
- It is important that ministries that fund intervention and prevention programs to address violence against women recognize the preventive nature of intervention services and the integral relationship between violence against women intervention and prevention.

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