



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

Brief to the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on Sexual violence and Harassment

Summary

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) calls on Select Committee members to address sexual violence through multiple levels which include concrete, community-based, policy and systemic approaches. Sexual violence cannot be divided from a broader context – one in which the victim-survivor, the violation itself (or threat of it), and the offender exist in a larger system of social norms, values and relations. The World Health Organization agrees that many prevailing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women and girls¹.

Introduction

Certainly, sexual violence is a crime: an act in violation of the Criminal Code of Canada². The impacts of sexual violence can also be understood via a trauma and health framework: an awareness of violence and abuse in women's lives, critical for "understanding mental illness and for assisting women in recovering and maintaining wellness"³.

Yet sexual violence cannot be divided from a broader context – one in which the victim-survivor, the violation itself (or threat of it), and the offender exist in a larger system of social norms, values and relations. The World Health Organization agrees that many prevailing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women and girls⁴.

In response, OCRCC recommends the following approaches to comprehensively understanding and addressing sexual violence and harassment in Ontario:

1. We believe that education on sexual violence – including information on prevalence, myths, misconceptions and attitudes informed by misogyny – greatly lends to the prevention of sexual violence.
2. A gender-based analysis ought to be integrated into all conversations and strategies for dealing with sexual violence, including workplace harassment.
3. We support that Aboriginal-led strategies are incorporated into planning to address sexual and gender-based violence against Aboriginal women.

¹ World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

² Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. *Criminal Code of Canada, Related to Sexual Assault*. Online: http://www.sascwr.org/files/www/resources_pdfs/legal/CRIMINAL_CODE_OF_CANADA.pdf

³ Morrow, M. with the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health. *Violence and Trauma in the Lives of Women with Serious Mental Illness Often Overlooked*. Online. See <http://www.cwhn.ca/en/node/39512>; and <http://bcccewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/TIP-Guide-May2013.pdf> for full study.

⁴ World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf



4. We support the integration of information and conversations on sexual consent, healthy relationships and online sexual activity (including online sexual violence) into health curriculum for young populations.
5. We recommend adequate and stable funding for Ontario's Sexual Assault Centres and other services that support survivors, so that they may better respond to sexual violence survivors in communities.
6. We remind stakeholders to recognize the connection between domestic violence and sexual violence.
7. We recommend that stakeholders aim to better understand and address reporting barriers – as well as understand and offer alternatives to reporting.

Overall, we ask that policy-makers, stakeholders and others work closely with women's and victims' advocates and victims themselves to learn more about where systems can improve, and strategize changes.

About Us

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) works toward the prevention and eradication of sexual assault. The Coalition recognizes that violence against women is one of the strongest indicators of prevailing societal attitudes towards women. Our membership includes sexual assault centres from across of Ontario, offering counselling, information and support services to survivors of sexual violence. We represent 26 (or 30) English-language sexual assault centres in Ontario that offer:

- Face-to-face counselling
- A 24-hour crisis line
- Group Counselling
- Hospital, police reporting & court accompaniment
- Social awareness – for example, Take Back The Night, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and December 6
- Public Education program to educate students, professionals and community members about sexual violence and sexual violence prevention
- Information on the legal system, community resources and strategies for coping
- Information and support for partners, families and friends of survivors

Over a one-year period, the Ministry of the Attorney General found that Ontario's 30 SAC agencies responded to 37,000 crisis line calls.

We believe that sexual violence cannot be separated from a broader context – one in which the victim-survivor, the offender, and the violation itself (or threat of the violation) exist in a larger system of social norms, relations and inequities. Consider, for example:

- A 2011 summary on police reported crime, which found that sexual crimes were by far the most common offence committed against girls⁵

⁵ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Released on February 25, 2013. *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends*. p. 15



- Women and young women from marginalized racial, sexual and socioeconomic groups are more vulnerable to being targeted for sexual violence⁶
- Over 80% of women who are sexually assaulted do not report due to humiliation or fear of re-victimization in the legal process⁷
- Many prevailing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women and girls⁸.

Understandings of sexual violence ought to be rooted in a socially-contextualized analysis of violence⁹. This includes a recognition of widespread societal sexual assault myths and misconceptions that function to minimize sexual assault and its impact on victim-survivors¹⁰; and a recognition that gender, race, age and other social determinants influence the targets of sexual violence, the perpetrators, and helping resources available to survivors¹¹.

Education and public discussion on sexual violence supports prevention.

We believe that education on sexual violence – including information on myths and misconceptions and attitudes informed by misogyny -- goes a long way towards the prevention of sexual violence. Public education and training offers opportunities for sexual violence prevention; innovative ways to challenge sexual assault myths and victim-blaming; skill building to appropriately responding to survivors; and reaching out to diverse and young populations, using a variety of new formats and technologies.

Public education promotes a focus on prevention of sexual assault as opposed to catching and imprisoning offenders. Ideally, we wish to see less sexual victimization than anything else. Prevention strategies include education on:

- supporting women and men to understand their rights
- for women and men to understand the continuum of sexual violence (not just forcible rape)
- supporting women and men to be exposed to and have opportunities to challenge sexual assault myths
- the laws/rights concerning sexual assault versus consent
- educating bystanders to better understand how to recognize sexual violence, intervene and support someone who is/might be targeted by sexual violence.

⁶ Wolfe and Chiodo, CAMH, 2008, p. 3.

⁷ METRAC. *Sexual Assault Statistics Sheet*. Online: <http://www.metrac.org/resources/downloads/sexual.assault.statistics.sheet.pdf>

⁸ World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

⁹ See: Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. *Organizational Profile: Basis Of Unity*. Online: <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/page-418415>

¹⁰ Sexual Assault centre Kingston. *Busting Myths*. Online: <http://www.sackingston.com/Default.aspx?pagelD=857971>;

And The Learning Network. *Overcoming Barriers and Enhancing Supportive Responses: The Research on Sexual Violence Against Women A Resource Document*. May 2012: 14.

¹¹ METRAC Sexual Assault Fact Sheet. Online: http://www.metrac.org/programs/info/prevent/ass_fact.htm. As example, risk of victimization increases if one is very young, a woman of color, non-heterosexual or poor. 50 percent of all Canadian women will survive at least one incident of sexual or physical violence, for example; but for Aboriginal women in the same country, this number climbs to eight in ten (80 percent).



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrccoordinator@hotmail.com

Public education can also draw connections between systemic issues (i.e. prevailing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women and girls¹²; attitudes and factors that contribute to rape culture¹³) and women's day to day experiences. The implementation of an Ontario-wide Action Plan, *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*¹⁴, announced by the Wynne government in March 2015, succeeds in connecting systemic components to the crime and individual acts of sexual violence in our communities. We are pleased to see that this Plan includes initiatives towards sexual violence prevention via education, training, and an ongoing acknowledgement of the role misogynist attitudes have upon sexually violence prevalence.

Last, education helps others learn how to respond to survivors who disclose their stories. Today, many organizations such as sexual assault centres, the Centre for Research on Violence and the Learning Network are doing innovative work on training professionals and the public on how to better understand and respectfully respond to sexual assault disclosures without repeating victim-blaming rhetoric. This can help survivor-victims who disclose their stories (formally or informally) by creating community support and mitigating victim-blame.

A gender-based analysis ought to be integrated into strategies for dealing with sexual violence, including workplace harassment.

Gender-based violence, such as sexual harassment, *is informed by* and also perpetuates women's subordinate legal, social or economic status in society.

A gender-based analysis retains this awareness, and uses it to assess the potential impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys. A gendered analysis can best identify and examine the prevalence of violence targeting women and/or perpetrated by men; and recommend solutions that fit¹⁵.

Sexual harassment includes "bullying, intimidating or offensive jokes or innuendos, displaying or circulating offensive pictures or materials, or offensive or intimidating communications"¹⁶. Patterns of harassment affect women and girls differently than men. In workplaces, both women and men may experience sexual harassment "but women tend to be more vulnerable to it because they often hold lower-paying, lower-authority and lower-status jobs compared to men"¹⁷, and can therefore get trapped in harassing situations. In addition, woman employees are more vulnerable to being targeted for comments and behaviors rooted in sexist and

¹² World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

¹³ See also: Hermann, D. The Rape Culture. Printed in *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (ed. Jo Freeman). Mcgraw Hill, 1994. Retrieved 18 October 2011. Available online:

http://homepage.smc.edu/delpiccolo_guido/Soc1/soc1readings/rape%20culture_final.pdf

¹⁴ Office of the Premier. March 8, 2015. *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*. Online: <http://www.news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/03/concrete-measures-to-end-sexual-violence-and-harassment.html>

¹⁵ Status of Women Canada. *What Is GBA+?*. Online: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-accs/intro-eng.html>

¹⁶ Ontario Women's Directorate. *Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives: Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan*. 2011: 9.

¹⁷ Ontario Human Rights Commission. *Sexual harassment in employment (fact sheet)*. Online: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/sexual-harassment-employment-fact-sheet>



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

conservative attitudes about work, women and gender roles. (It should be noted, however, that men can be targeted with sexist and heterosexist expectations too.)

Some current Canadian/Ontario practices, laws and policies were informed by women's advocates in the past (i.e. Bill 168, criminal harassment laws), and incorporate their expertise and useful ways.

Specifically, we recommend workplace harassment policies and practices that identify and address:

- Women experiencing domestic violence in the workplace
- Women facing sexual and gender-based harassment
- Fostering a workplace "culture"/environment that is inclusive and diverse, and actively resists gendered, racial and other divisions
- Practical solutions/strategies to resolve workplace violence – for example, strategies that take into consideration women's fear for their safety, fear of not being believed, or resistance to use formal reporting procedures.

We support an Aboriginal-led Strategy to address sexual and gender-based violence against Aboriginal women.

As women's advocates, we know that the threat of violence continues to be a reality in the lives of Canadian girls and women: 51% of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of sexual or physical violence¹⁸. However, violence affecting Aboriginal girls and women in Canada is even worse. On average, Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 are *five times more likely* than other Canadian women of the same age to die as a result of violence¹⁹.

According to Amnesty International, over 580 Aboriginal women have been reported missing or murdered in Canada; most of these cases remain unsolved. While it is important that women experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence have access to the legal system, they also need alternatives to police reporting and the justice system.

While we note Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women²⁰ initiatives, we also believe that the province needs to do more. OCRCC supports strategies on addressing violence against Aboriginal women, informed and led by Aboriginal women and communities.

We support that issues around sexual consent and online sexual violence are now being implemented into the school curriculum on health and sexual education.

The move to integrate information and conversations on sexual consent, healthy relationships and online sexual activity (including online sexual violence) is much-needed. OCRCC applauds this move by Ontario's government.

¹⁸ METRAC. Sexual Assault Statistics Sheet.

¹⁹ 2004 Amnesty International report, "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada."

²⁰ See <http://www.offfc.org/publication/strategic-framework-end-violence-against-aboriginal-women> for more information.



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

As Planned Parenthood Toronto's Director Sarah Hobbs-Blyth notes on sexual violence, healthy sexuality and sexual consent, "a society that doesn't know how to talk about boundaries, consent or sexual violence without doing further harm to the victims" is problematic – and has little skill to support victims that do speak out:

"While we are bombarded daily with sexual images, innuendos and expectations, rarely does the conversation go beyond that. If we want to have a society where we can talk honestly, realistically and openly about sex then we also need to talk about consent, and if we talk about consent we need to talk about sexual violence. You can't talk about one without talking about the others²¹."

OCRCC agrees that supporting young people to better understand their bodies, their rights and patterns of healthy versus unhealthy relationships are key to preventing sexual violence in this population.

Fund Ontario's Sexual Assault Centres and other services that support survivors adequately, so that they may better respond to sexual violence survivors in communities.

We thank our provincial government for their commitment to sexual assault centres and other services that support women affected by sexual violence. However, Ontario sexual assault centres continue to operate under very moderate funding allocations.

Statistics tell us that two out of three Canadian women have experienced sexual assault²² – yet while an estimated majority (some say 80-90%) of survivors of sexual violence do not access the criminal justice system, much government resources are directed towards the few survivors that do. In 2014, Justice Canada studies, examined the economic cost of violent crime: by far the largest single cost — \$4.8 billion of the total — was attributed to sexual assault and other sexual offences, crimes in which more than 90 per cent of victims were women.

"The victims bear the greatest burden of the [financial] impacts, much of it intangible, and family, friends and employers can also be burdened" by costs and lost wages, the study shared. The authors conclude..."The impacts are eventually felt by all Canadians in the form of public spending on the justice system and social services"²³.

In this area, we ask the Ontario government to:

- Commit to stable and adequate funding for Ontario sexual assault centres. Send the message to all Ontarians that your government believes that women and girls – and their safety from sexual violence – are important

²¹ See: <http://www.ppt.on.ca/newsite/news/what-if-we-talked-about-consent-in-sex-ed/> for the entire blog Planned Parenthood Toronto.

²² METRAC. http://www.metrac.org/programs/info/prevent/ass_fact.htm

²³ Beeby, D. for The Toronto Star. March 2, 2014. *Violent crimes in Canada cost nearly \$13 billion in one year*. Online: http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/03/02/violent_crimes_in_canada_cost_nearly_13_billion_in_one_year.html



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrccoordinator@hotmail.com

- Commit to support the implementation of the Ontario Sexual Action Plan, and ensure its implementation is guided by women's advocates from Ontario sexual assault centres and other women's advocates.
- Give recognition to the expertise of and work being done by sexual assault centres in Ontario, survivor-victims, and their contribution to the overall health and wellbeing of Ontario communities.

The Ontario-wide Action Plan, *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*²⁴, announced by the Wynne government in March 2015, includes a commitment towards supporting community-based sexual assault centres with stable funding. We are pleased to see that the Plan recognizes centres and their work, and support this important move towards stable and adequate funding.

Recognize the connection between domestic violence and sexual violence.

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women found that 38% of sexually assaulted women were assaulted by their husbands, common-law partners or boyfriends²⁵. Although sexual assault within relationships has been illegal in Canada since 1983, few women report such incidents to police.

In 2010, survivors who took part in survivor consultations in sexual assault centres across the province identified the intersection of partner-perpetrated violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence:

- "Wife abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse is a central issue...we need to have these issues gain more coverage" (Guelph survivor, 2010)
- [Women need a] "better network between resources — allow agencies to put plans together for themselves and their children" (Guelph survivor, 2010)
- "Better networking between agencies — to allow the sharing of information" (Kenora survivor, 2010)
- "It's 2010 and all the agencies still have the stereotypes that a person isn't abused if they don't physically see a mark on them. I had a problem inside...from my husband sexually abusing me" (Sarnia-Lambton survivor, 2010)

These comments acknowledge the complex intersections of intimate partner violence and sexual violence — and their impacts on women, including women's capacity to access justice, health and other helping systems.

Last, in order to really address sexual violence, we need to shift the conversation away from reporting issues *alone* — and shift it to addressing a culture that currently condones sexual violence.

²⁴ Office of the Premier. March 8, 2015. *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*. Online: <http://www.news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/03/concrete-measures-to-end-sexual-violence-and-harassment.html>

²⁵ Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993. Quoted by Springtide Resources in *Sexual Assault: Dispelling the Myths*. <http://old.springtideresources.org/resources/show.cfm?id=88>



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

Focusing on *increasing sexual assault reporting* won't necessarily increase support to victims. Our current system is rife with problems that do not make reporting a necessarily useful or supportive method to dealing with sexual violence.

To begin, in reality, the majority of all reported sexual assault cases are simply not reported at all (less than 10%)²⁶ – and those that *are* reported are not always resolved through the criminal justice system. Due to the limits of the criminal justice system response, a small minority of those initially charged with sexual assault actually see convictions²⁷.

Of course, we advocate for systems that take sexual violence seriously, policies and laws that work for women and for victims, and laws that function well whether the offender is a stranger (uncommon) OR known to the victim (much more common).

Still, today, conviction rates are very low, which de-validates the experiences of survivors and works to suggest that sexual assault is a rare crime. Moreover, marginalized sexual assault survivors (youth, sex-trade workers, women engaged in substance use, women living in poverty, for example), are at greater risk of being targeted for sexual assault -- and yet it is these very populations who will be most highly scrutinized for their behavior/role/reactions in context with the assault, should they testify in court. As these components are complex, you can see how it is not enough to just tell women to report. It is not enough to tell women to go and tell your story to a system, which, over the course of most-times more than a year, will simply function to challenge, disbelieve or scrutinize her in the face of a crime. Yes, women can and ought to feel they have the right to report: but they will also need information, support -- and alternatives to reporting, should they choose not to.

These alternatives can include:

1. Prevention, education and training
2. Challenging sexual violence myths
3. Supporting professionals, lay-persons, bystanders and the public at large to sensitively respond to sexual violence disclosures, believe victims, and offer basic support
4. Referral to community supports that offer ongoing and in-depth support: see www.sexualassaultsupport.ca

To support survivors of sexual violence overall, we need increased awareness of victim-blaming myths amongst criminal justice, media, health and social service professionals, and a commitment to resist reproducing these myths. Rape culture and its attaching victim-blaming rhetoric informs low reporting rates, and reduces victims' capacity to reach out for support overall.

Challenging rape culture means:

²⁶ METRAC. *Sexual Assault Statistics Sheet*. Online: <http://www.metrac.org/resources/downloads/sexual.assault.statistics.sheet.pdf>

²⁷ The Learning Network. *The Network Comes to Life*. May 2012: 2. Available online:

http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/learningtoendabuse.ca.vawlearningnetwork/files/LN_Newsletter_May_2012_Issue_1.pdf



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

- Resisting and recognizing definitions of sexualized violence that are contingent on traditional or conservative constructs of sexual assault victims' behaviors, dress or sexual history
- These definitions support a culture that “continues to differentiate between good women that can be raped and bad women who cannot”²⁸, and suggest that sexual violence definitions are based on the behavior or actions of the victim-survivor, as opposed to the act of sexually aggression.

Challenging rape culture means also means resisting common sexual violence myths, such as:

- The misconception that sexual assault is typically perpetrated by strangers or social outsiders. The majority of sexual assault offenders are in fact known to the victim in some way²⁹
- Myths about sexual assault, which posit that innocent men are often accused of sexual assault and women lie about it to get revenge, for their own benefit, or because they feel guilty about having sex³⁰
- The misconception that false allegations of sexual assault are a common problem. In reality, many survivors of sexual assault are regularly not believed or supported when they disclose their experiences.

As you can imagine, these strategies will help survivors who *do* choose to engage in formal reporting structures —as well as those who choose *not* to do so.

We also ask that policy-makers, stakeholders and others to work closely with women's and victims' advocates (and victims themselves) to learn about where systems can improve, and strategize changes.

Remember, much of the gains in this area – amendments to Canadian family law, such as equal division or property; changes to sexual assault laws; and the development of women's shelters and safe houses – “have all been made with resolute perseverance, unrelenting lobbying...and demands for change”³¹ by women's activists, survivor-victims, and the collaborative support of government stakeholders over time.

Thank you again for your commitment to working with those who have input in the area of addressing sexual violence and harassment, including sexual assault centres.

²⁸ Cossins, Anne. “Saints, Sluts and Sexual Assault: Rethinking the Relationship Between Sex, Race and Gender.” *Social and Legal Studies* 12 (1) (2003): 95.

²⁹ Statistics Canada, 2003, *The Daily*, 25 July

³⁰ Sexual Assault centre Kingston. *Busting Myths*. Online: <http://www.sackington.com/Default.aspx?pagelD=857971>; And The Learning Network. *Overcoming Barriers and Enhancing Supportive Responses: The Research on Sexual Violence Against Women A Resource Document*. May 2012: 14.

³¹ *Ibid*, 20



Ontario Coalition of
Rape Crisis Centres

Telephone: 905-299-4428
Website: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca
Email: ocrcccoordinator@hotmail.com

Nicole Pietsch,
Coordinator,

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC)