

Violence in Relationships

Safety Planning & Risk Assessment - General Information

Some Statistics

- According to Police Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) women represent approximately 85% of victims reporting spousal abuse to police. Men represent about 15% of victims.
- Family breakdown is demonstrated to increase the risk of violence in relationships and homicide. In 1999, 40% of women who reported experiencing spousal abuse by a past partner indicated that the violence occurred after the couple separated.
- A recent survey indicated that nearly one in five separated wives were assaulted while they were separated.
- Murder of a female partner is most like to occur in the context of marital separation or divorce.
- Between 1978 and 1997, 1,485 females and 442 males were killed by their spouses in Canada.
- Studies show that women are at greatest risk for being killed when they attempt to leave or end the relationship.
- The risk is greatest in the first 2 months.
- Nearly 3 in 10 Canadian women (29%) who have ever been married or lived in a common-law relationship have been physically or sexually assaulted by marital partner at some point during the relationship; 21% of these women were assaulted during pregnancy.

Why Women Stay

- Leaving increases the risk.
- Fear, threats to her, kids, family or pets.
- Financial dependency – no options.
- Most women don't want to leave; they just want the abuse to stop.
- She loves him.
- They have children together.
- Will have to leave the reserve and/or give up her home or community.
- Doesn't want to be alone.
- Feels safer with the harm she knows that with the unknown.
- Doesn't realize the level of danger she is in or minimizes it.
- Does not speak English well.
- Isolation.
- Feels she deserves it, damaged self image.
- Female socialization – keeping the family together, accommodating.
- Shame – ashamed to come forward, will shame family, husband.

Safety Planning – An Ongoing Process

- Risk and safety planning is an ongoing process and should be reviewed each time there is contact with the victim.
- The goal is to increase the abused women's ability to evaluate changes in risk and modify plans as necessary.
- Safety planning can empower a woman and make her feel safer but it does not guarantee her safety, it does reduce her risk.

Empowering Women

- Battered women must identify their own needs and construct their own safety plan. It is our role to help identify the risks and present her with additional strategies or options.
- Women know best what triggers violence by their partners but may not fully understand the degree to which the violence can escalate.

Avoiding Assumption

Avoid assuming you know the full extent or impact of violence; remember that at the crisis phase or during 1st contact you will only get a small piece of her story.

- Victims may not speak freely.
- Full extent is revealed over a period of time.
- Women may minimize their experience.
- Hear her story in her own words.
- Establishing trust takes time.

Risks to Women's Safety

- Separation or Divorce
- Escalation of Violence
- Past Assaultive Behaviour by Accused
- Violent Threats – Intention or Ideation
- Recent Suicidal or Homicidal Intention
- Extreme Minimization or Denial of Past Abuse on Partner
- Pregnancy/New Birth
- Stalking
- Sexual Assault of Partner
- Child Abuse
- Animal Abuse
- Mental Health and Depression
- Issues of Control
- History of Violence/Career Criminal
- Employment or Financial Problems
- Substance or Alcohol Abuse
- Violation of Criminal or Civil Court Orders

Safety Planning – What's Working?

Discuss past safety plans or strategies and learn what has already worked, what she's tried and expand on her successes when discussing more in depth planning. Is something different this time?

Respect and Trust

- Be mindful that our clients come to us with a wide variety of past experiences, cultures and beliefs. They may have negative feelings towards the justice system, police and service providers.
- A non-judgmental approach can promote healthy communication, trust and a willingness to seek support when most vulnerable. NEVER GIVE UP!