

In addition to the consultations, the Panel initiated research work which enabled it to draw upon the experience, knowledge and analytical insights of women's organizations. Data from the Panel consultations was complemented by a review of the considerable body of research and documentation on violence against women already undertaken by women's organizations, academics and governments. Neither the nature nor the term of the Panel's mandate permitted the conduct of primary research. However, researchers were contracted to consolidate work already done in less thoroughly examined subject areas such as violence against women of colour, refugee women, domestic workers, and women living in rural settings, among others.

We partially funded a Toronto-based study of violence against women, The Women's Safety Project (discussed in more detail later on in this Executive Summary), which generated some important statistics on prevalence. As well, we distributed a survey through members of Parliament to their constituents which provided another means for Canadians to share their experiences of violence and offer opinions about solutions.

It would be impossible in this relatively brief document to summarize all of the material contained in the Panel's Final Report. What must be done, however, is to communicate the Panel's perspective on violence against women as our approach underpins and explains both the overall scope and the specific measures set out in the National Action Plan which is Part Two of this document.

The Social Context of Violence

Every day in this country women are maligned, humiliated, shunned, screamed at, pushed, kicked, punched, assaulted, beaten, raped, physically disfigured, tortured, threatened with weapons and murdered. Some women are indeed more vulnerable than others, but all women, simply by virtue of their gender, are potential victims of violence. Moreover, the violence is often directed at them by those whom they have been encouraged to trust, those whom they are taught to respect, those whom they love. Violence against women cuts across all racial, social, cultural, economic, political and religious spectrums. While there is no question that violence may be conditioned by these factors, the fact remains that all women are at risk.

The voices of women throughout the Final Report are a sample of what we heard during our consultations across the country. Their words — unadorned, unedited — tell the story more effectively than volumes of explanation, exhortation and interpretation. The message is direct and urgent, carried by quotes throughout this text — voices of women of all ages, faiths, colour and class who have been there, are still there.

We know that Canadians have a sense that violence against women exists and that many women live with violence on a daily basis. However, we also know that Canadians do not have a real perception of the enduring repercussions of violence and how the experience and fear of violence affect the daily existence of women. There is no better way for people to appreciate these conditions than through the words of the women who have survived them.

The Panel's Final Report emphasizes that violence must be understood as a continuum that ranges from verbal insults through physical blows to murder. The voices we heard, the submissions we received and extensive research demonstrate the many dimensions of violence against women — physical, sexual, psychological, financial and spiritual. For many women, all these are part of their experience of violence.

This page is selected because of the first sentence that appears under the heading, “The Social Context of Violence” where it indicates to the Canadian government that women are tortured in the domestic/private sphere.