

Voices from the Front Lines

A report of

*The Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to
End Woman Abuse*

&

*The London Coordinating Committee to
End Woman Abuse*

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“We place unrealistic expectations on women who have already been abused. They have a maximum stay of forty-two days in shelter. They have to get through three locked doors and bulletproof glass every time they enter or leave. They are homeless, without money and they are expected to move through in an average of twenty-one days when there is no housing. We expect that they can move out and function and thrive. It is a travesty that we contribute to the devastation of women’s souls. Their children are upset; everything is awful. We contribute; we don’t stand up and say women and children deserve better. We cannot continue to support this service delivery. Change the paradigm. If we continue to support this, how are men accountable for their behaviour, the stresses and the blame and the shame? This is what we do. We do this. We contribute to this. We are all creative and we need to try to figure out ways to make a patchwork quilt of support. We should be ranting more.”

“The difficulties are more severe here [in rural Middlesex County] than in London; there are always less options. Services have less money and less staff. For women, contact with others is very difficult. It’s hard to see past barriers of transportation and isolation, so women are shadowed by a sense of desperation.”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report is the result of interviews and focus groups conducted between August 2003 and September 2004. The purpose of the report is to examine gaps in service, especially as they pertain to the rural area of Middlesex County. I felt it would be important to contextualize the gaps in services in the rural areas of Middlesex County by examining these rural services against the background of those available in London, the urban centre of the county.

I interviewed most members of both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse. I also interviewed other service providers and professionals whom respondents and my Advisory Committee suggested could be helpful. In total, I conducted sixty-four interviews and five focus groups. Every individual with whom I spoke has contributed something to this report. Individuals who wished to be named in the report and the organizations they represent are included in Appendix 1.

What is presented in the following pages is a snapshot of the movement to end violence against women in London and Middlesex County at a particular point in time. As the report has evolved, I have come to see it as a facilitated discussion between people who work with abused women and their children and/or men who abuse. The experts cited here work in different ways, in different settings, in different sectors and professions. I think that an exchange of perspectives and insights and ideas may be a fruitful way to improve our responses. We are all working for the safety of women and children. Much as I have tried to truly represent the voices of those with whom I spoke, I take final responsibility for the views and perspectives presented here.

Finding a Common Understanding of Woman Abuse

Do we all have the same definition of woman abuse? Do we all use the same theoretical framework for identifying and analyzing the effects of woman abuse? Because the respondents in this study work in such varied settings, it seemed important to find out if there is some common ground that we all stand on as we respond to those with experiences of woman abuse. My first thought was to ask respondents if they have a feminist understanding of woman abuse, but it soon became clear that “feminist” is itself a term that has different meanings for different people. Instead, I asked respondents if they use the Power and Control Wheel as a basis for understanding woman abuse.

The wheel is important because it defines woman abuse as an attempt to have power over and control of a woman. A few respondents, none of whom were members of the Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse, were not familiar with it. Most, but not all respondents, acknowledged using the power and control wheel as the basis of their understanding of woman abuse. And finally, there was a set of respondents that use the Power and Control Wheel along with other theoretical frameworks. An important critique did emerge about the Power and Control Wheel, highlighting the fact that it was developed and has been used with little attention to how racism, or for that matter

classism, homophobia, ableism or other forms of oppression intersect with the problem of violence against women.

Some respondents raised the concern that our definition of woman abuse is too narrow. Others spoke of the fragmentation of service that goes along with a narrow conception of woman abuse as intimate partner violence. The fact is that women who find themselves in relationships marked by intimate partner abuse often grew up in a violent home, or were emotionally neglected or sexually abused. For example, one counsellor reported that she is now seeing the daughters of women whom she counselled years earlier. A narrow definition of woman abuse obscures the connectedness of different forms of violence against women and ignores the fact that the roots of the problem may lie in childhood victimization. It also leads to the concentration of resources in efforts to deal with only one piece of an intersecting puzzle. Funding mandates were also mentioned as a factor making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to respond holistically to violence against women.

Contextual Societal Challenges

There was a strong perception amongst respondents that we are dealing with an increasingly complex set of problems. Few respondents reported dealing with women whose only problem was woman abuse. Generally, there was a consensus that when woman abuse is an isolated problem and women have support and are financially independent, they are more able to leave and to stay out of abusive relationships. The trend described by many, however, is one of people with a range of interrelated problems and, at best, a piecemeal response to those problems.

Social service cuts, and parallel cutbacks in health and education, were identified as a major factor exacerbating these difficulties. Respondents spoke often of the problems posed by poverty and of the increasing marginalization of families who are living below the poverty line, a situation that has unquestionably been worsened by cutbacks. Some felt that epidemic rates of violence against women and an increasing number of child deaths have been fed by poverty. They called attention to the fact that abuse forces women and children to live in poverty, for lifetimes, and sometimes for generations.

Specifically policies governing the way Ontario Works is administered were identified as a grave problem. There were strong feelings that reductions to social assistance have really hurt people. Several respondents spoke of the damaging legacy of the Harris government. They were disturbed by a 'collective yawn' at the condition of the most vulnerable.

People with mental illness have also suffered terribly in these circumstances, and many of them are women. The lack of social supports has resulted in many people with mental illness being jailed. 25-35 percent of the prison population suffers from mental illness, leading Justice Edward Ormston, from the Mental Health Division Court, to remark, "Jail is the only place open to mentally ill people twenty-four hours day. Often the price of homelessness is jail."

Increasingly Complex Lives

There was a large degree of consensus among respondents that the situations they deal with are becoming more complex, and that intervention and resource needs have intensified. For the most part, there was strong agreement that the growing needs and the bigger and bigger crises facing abused women and their children, and sometimes the men who abuse them as well, are related to poverty and cutbacks.

Complex problems are stressful for those trying to address them, as well as for those experiencing them. Respondents frequently reported feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the situations they faced. Implicitly or explicitly, they also named the problem as being larger than any single organization and called attention to the need for a systemic response. These are not problems that will go away or even remain at a consistent level if inaction and inattention is our response. The misery and suffering of women and children will increase and the ensuing societal costs will intensify with each new generation born into hopelessness.

Dealing with problems of woman abuse, addictions and mental health in the criminal justice system is the most costly option of all. The situation demands a great deal more early intervention and prevention efforts.

Layers of Marginalization and Isolation

Isolation is both an effect of violence and a risk factor for experiencing violence. When women are marginalized and isolated for any reason, their risk of victimization increases. Isolation and marginalization occur for a variety of reasons, including language, cultural, racial identity, living in a rural area, poverty, physical or mental health problems, age, addictions, participation in the sex trade or being in conflict with the law. These women can be victimized through interpersonal violence, racism, social exclusion and/or extreme poverty.

Being aware of the multiple ways in which a woman can be marginalized helps us to recognize the structures that create such inequity. The Kitchen Table Project, a study of women in the mental health system that was coordinated locally, tells us that “eighty percent of participants spoke of either childhood abuse and/or violence in current relationships.” Those working in addiction services have noted a similar link. Despite a growing understanding that woman abuse is intricately linked to mental health problems and addictions in the lives of women, none of the sectors are fully prepared to deal with women whose lives are complicated by all of these factors

A study conducted by the Family Consultants of the London Police Force demonstrates that in the absence of appropriate support for people with mental health problems, they are criminalized, overwhelmingly for minor offenses. In light of this, a respondent explains that in closing down hospitals for the mentally ill, “We have trans-institutionalized. We have moved people from hospitals to jails.”

Many women who are homeless also have mental health problems and/or substance abuse problems. Some of them are involved in exchanging sex for food, shelter and

perhaps drugs. We can surmise from the research mentioned above and other similar studies that the vast majority of these women are dealing with past and/or current abuse experiences. Yet most of our services are not able to deal with the complex issues that these women present.

The First Nations women who participated in this study readily acknowledged that violence against women is a serious problem for them. These respondents situated violence against women in the broader context of colonization, a process that has had a devastating impact on First Nations peoples. Author and editor Kim Anderson further explains the link between residential schools and CAS involvement in the lives of First Nations people. First Nations respondents saw the solutions to woman abuse as being contingent upon addressing the gamut of social and health problems that racism and colonization has caused in their communities. And they clearly see real solutions as emerging from their own traditional cultural practices.

Respondents also spoke eloquently about the challenges of abused women who are new to Canada and about the barriers that they confront, both from their own communities and from our services. Although several respondents commented on the challenges in diversifying staff to better reflect the changing demographics of our community, this report does include the voices of racially and ethnically diverse people. Their insights are tremendously important to us and will continue to be as we plan to meet the emerging challenges of our community.

The Interdependence of Women and Children: Working Across Sectors

The fact that children's wellbeing is dependent upon the wellbeing of their parents and, in most cases, upon that of their mothers, is a simple truth that we can all too easily lose sight of in our institutional responses to woman abuse. Many respondents expressed concern that new legislation focusing on the potential harm of children witnessing abuse reinforces a separation between the interests of abused women and their children.

The dramatic increase in the number of children going into CAS care in our community has received a lot of attention recently. A major research study shows that woman abuse, poverty, maternal depression, impaired parenting capacity and intergenerational CAS involvement are major contributing factors to this problem. The Eligibility Spectrum is a decision making tool used by CAS workers that outlines how to assess for risk much more clearly than previously was the case. Nonetheless, some respondents questioned whose interests are served by a focus on risk assessment. They were concerned that risk assessment can be misused, especially by inexperienced workers.

The decision to move from a risk assessment model to a strengths-based model is provincial one, not a local one. Nonetheless, a critical step towards this shift is building a good collaborative working relationship between the child protection sector and the violence against women sector. This community has recognized that and has taken positive steps towards building and sustaining relationships. This can go a long way

towards helping abused women to care for and keep their children, but it cannot make up for the lack of services when they are needed, whether for the children or the mother. In contrast to the ambivalence and outright criticism the new legislation intended to deal with child witnesses of woman abuse has garnered from the VAW sector, the Community Group Treatment program is widely accepted and highly regarded. This model of intervention provides concurrent groups for children who have witnessed abuse and their mothers. This approach allows CAS and VAW workers to work closely together and to learn from each other. They pool resources and both deepen their understanding of woman abuse and child abuse.

While many respondents expressed their appreciation for this program, others did point out its limitations. It is not able to adequately address the needs of severely traumatized children who require individual attention. Because all of the available funding to assist child witnesses was poured into a single initiative, there are no resources to assist those children. This is yet another example of how we cannot design, “one size fits all” programs and expect them to adequately and effectively respond to the needs of an entire community.

The real challenge in the situation is for policy makers. We must find ways to address the roots of the interrelated problems we are seeing; children going into CAS care, woman abuse, poverty, mental health problems and intergenerational involvement with CAS. This means investing more in prevention and early intervention efforts.

Using the Law to Hold Abusers Accountable and Supporting Women through the Criminal Justice System

In Canada historic reforms to improve a criminal justice response to intimate partner abuse have included a number of components: development and implementation of pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies; training programs for criminal justice professionals; support and advocacy for victims; court-mandated programs for batterers; and public education initiatives aimed at conveying the message that family violence is unacceptable.¹ Building on this foundation, Ontario introduced a comprehensive, province-wide Domestic Violence Justice Strategy in response to the May/Illes Inquest and the 1999 recommendations of the Joint Committee on Domestic Violence. On December 13, 2004, The McGuinty Government launched a new Action Plan on Domestic Violence. They describe it as a proactive plan that puts new emphasis on prevention and better community support for abused women and their children.

Although the pro-charging policies have resulted in some unintended negative consequences, the majority of intimate partner abuse victims nonetheless express strong support for the pro-charge policy. An intimate partner abuse victim needs to know that if she calls the police to report an incident of violence, the police will come and will, at a

¹ This discussion of the national context references the *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation*, prepared for the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice. The full report is available at: <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/reports/spousal.html>

minimum, stop the immediate incident of violence. The pro-charging policy promotes a strong and consistent first line of response by the criminal justice system that contributes to ensuring the safety and security of intimate partner abuse victims.

National research clearly documents some frustrations with the mandatory prosecution policy, by prosecutors, victims and the public alike. Some prosecutors express unhappiness about being expected to prosecute cases absent a cooperative victim/witness. Some victims do not want to support a prosecution against, or to testify against, a partner with whom they have reconciled. Locally, respondents generally recognized the mandatory charging policy as an important historical development that helped enormously to take woman abuse from the realm of the private out into the public. Yet some respondents voiced doubts, noting that it has some downsides as well. National research also shows that some victims are of the view that the criminal justice system still does not treat intimate partner abuse seriously enough, as reflected by the sentences imposed on intimate partner abusers. As well, members of the public often voice opposition to a process or policy that does not uniformly lead to the traditional criminal justice response, namely, incarceration.

Domestic violence courts have been established to permit a focus on the special nature of woman abuse cases by court officials who have an understanding of the dynamics of the problem. Coordination within the justice process and beyond is supported through specially tailored court case management strategies. Systems or protocols have been developed to support New Crown Attorneys. London does not have a dedicated domestic violence courtroom, but rather employs a domestic violence process. There is a domestic violence team of crowns with specialized training. All crowns get specific domestic violence training, but the team has more. This team supervises all prosecution of domestic violence cases.

Abusive partner intervention and treatment programs are offered in most Canadian jurisdictions. All programs offer group counselling, sometimes supplemented by individual counselling and a specialized curriculum, generally based on the dynamics of power and control. In London Changing Ways has the responsibility for delivering group counselling to men who abuse their partners. The agency also has a Women's Contact Coordinator to work with the women whose partners are in the program.

Despite some difficulties, and though empirical studies are few, there is early evidence to suggest that risk assessments used in safety planning for victims of intimate partner violence may provide additional insights, help victims adopt new safety measures or help parties match safety planning to specific dangers. As part of Ontario's Domestic Violence Justice Strategy, police will be collecting data using a Domestic Violence Supplementary Report Form (DVSR), which includes a risk assessment component.

Auditing, monitoring and accountability mechanisms allow jurisdictions to assess the effectiveness of strategies and to ensure compliance. To track the progress of cases through the justice system and to assess the impact of program and process changes on an ongoing basis, a jurisdiction needs an integrated information system. The capacity of jurisdictions to track cases from the point of a call to police through sentence completion

is severely limited, as, for the most part, justice information systems do not link components (police, the Crown and Correctional Services).

There is increasing recognition that a coordinated response is required; one that integrates criminal justice, social service, mental health and community responses. The fact that this goal has been difficult to achieve is not surprising. For one thing, criminal justice institutions are asked to make links to social services agencies in domestic violence cases that they are not asked to make in other types of crimes. Traditionally, the overriding objective of the criminal justice system has been the detection and sanction of perpetrators of crime. Reforms that address empowerment and support of victims have challenged the legal system's culture, processes and priorities. The ambiguity of goals can cause difficulty at the operational level for police and the Crown. Nevertheless there is a solid base of relationships in this community that facilitates communication when tension occurs.

Policing within the geographic area of Middlesex County is a complicated affair. There are several services at work; the London Police Service is responsible for the City of London, the Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service is responsible for the town of Strathroy and Caradoc Township, and the Ontario Provincial Police are responsible for rural areas of Middlesex County.

The First Nations Reserves of Muncey and Chippewa and the settlement of Oneida have their own services. These services are not held accountable under the Police Service Act or the Adequacy Standards.

Inevitably there are inconsistencies in the organization of responses to woman abuse, in philosophies about woman abuse and in the experiences of both police and community members.

Clearly, London has been a leader in formulating and implementing effective criminal justice responses to woman abuse. This leadership has been widely recognized. But the intense learning process of the London Police Service has not been paralleled in the other services that work throughout Middlesex County. Cultural practices that discourage reporting are one reason why women may not report abuse. Fragmented policing with varying standards and accountability is another.

Still, several officers from smaller police services outside of London noted that there may be a definite advantage for women who report to them because the same officer will be able to follow their case through to resolution. As a result, they will get more individualized attention and have better access to immediate information about what is going on in their case.

No provisions for transportation for those living outside of the city have been built into the specialized domestic violence process and the Victim Witness Assistance Program, and this means that many men and women face significant challenges when they need to access them.

The result of this uneven development is, not surprisingly, an uneven response to woman abuse throughout Middlesex County.

Negotiating Custody And Access, Child Support Payments and Property Settlements

While much attention has been paid to the criminal response to woman abuse since the 1980s, the family law system and the potential pitfalls it holds for abused women have been largely ignored. The provision of legal aid for women leaving abusive relationships is at best inadequate. This lack of adequate legal aid funding in the family law system has had devastating repercussions for women needing legal assistance. This grossly inadequate legal support for abused women must be considered against the backdrop of an increasingly well organized father's rights movement determined to undermine women's legal rights.

London is home to two programs that assist people to deal with the family law system. In 1998, a local lawyer who had represented primarily women, many of whom were abused, changed the nature of her practice. She met with representatives of front line services to propose that she work on-site in shelters and other agencies that assist abused women to provide one on one legal advice on family matters.

The service provided encompasses more than straight legal information. The lawyer is aware of a lot of resources and makes whatever referrals might be most helpful. Feedback from women and from agencies indicates that this service is helpful because it's on-site, it deals with women's specific situations and information is kept confidential. This is a unique program that has not been replicated elsewhere. It has been carefully planned to address the significant gaps in service for women in the family law system. It has been informed by a sound knowledge of the dynamics of woman abuse. It deals with abused women empathetically and recognizes the significant structural barriers they face in the system. While it cannot make up for inadequate legal aid allocations and the difficult access to committed and qualified family law lawyers, it does offer women a significant degree of support in dealing with their legal situation when they separate from a controlling partner.

As well, there is the Family Law Information Centre, a province-wide program operating in London as well as several other cities. The Centre is a three-way partnership between the Attorney General's office, Legal Aid Ontario and the Family Court in London. It offers the services of the three partners within the physical space of the court-house.

The FLIC offers a range of services, including a free information session, entitled "Couples Apart, Parents Forever," two nights each month. The Mediation Service has a Mediation Referral Coordinator who is the first point of contact. She is part of a team that includes a social worker and Advice Counsel. She provides an outline of family law matters and she may interview someone to find out more about why they are there. She asks about woman abuse.

People can book mediations through the court-house office. There is a screening process for readiness to mediate that assesses emotional readiness, capacity, mental health and addictions and power imbalances. The aim is to assess if the two people can sit down together and work out a fair agreement. On-site mediation is for anyone who is in court that day and wants to mediate short-term issues.

Advocates for abused women have long had concerns about abused women entering into mediation. They point out that the power imbalance in the relationship can carry over into the mediation process, resulting in women being further controlled or placed in danger. The staff at FLIC were less ready to dismiss mediation as an option for abused women.

FLIC staff demonstrate an awareness and understanding of woman abuse. Where possible, they have adapted and modified processes to help ensure both identification of and safety for abused women. Although it was not designed to meet the needs of abused women, the FLIC program has made accommodations. Sensitive staff can provide valuable support to abused women, but mediation should be a choice. Women should not turn to mediation only because they have exceeded their legal aid hours and this is their only option.

Services under Stress

Abused women and their children, and even abusive men, are facing increasing degrees of stress in their lives. More people turn to helping agencies with complex problems. Respondents in this study identified sources of pressure. Some, such as funding difficulties and staff workloads, are intricately related. Diminishing and unstable core funding has moved agencies to apply for more grant funding. Increasingly, grant writing is becoming an important skill in the violence against women movement. As the demand for agencies to respond to more with less continues to grow, respondents see themselves reaching their limits.

Respondents discussed the impact of working without sufficient resources, with increased workloads, more complexities and more administrative responsibilities. Some even voiced concern about being able to maintain their quality of service.

Those who work with abused women and children face pain and violence. Sometimes they absorb this, resulting in vicarious trauma. While there is still some resistance to acknowledging vicarious trauma, organizations are increasingly developing strategies to deal with it.

Accomplishments and Steps Forward

The Violence Against Women sector has met many challenges and has continued to find creative and innovative ways of working. Respondents reported many things they were proud of, including having developed a compassionate leadership and having kept the problems of societal violence and women abuse in the public eye by encouraging discussion and dialogue. The outcome has been more positive and effective community responses to woman abuse. Women in crisis now have a much better referral network they can turn to, including anonymous help lines and more recent innovations such as

Shelternet. Respondents also pointed to positive systemic changes, such as the availability of Public Health Nurses to work in shelters, the OPP decision to have a Domestic Violence Coordinator, courses on domestic violence that Ontario Crown Attorneys must now take, the stalking law, outreach programs that visit high schools and the RUCS Protocol in the mental health sector.

The Growth and Development of a Movement

Unquestionably, the violence against women sector has become more professional since its inception in the mid-70s. In the comments of respondents, I uncovered both a dialogue and a debate around what we are gaining and what we are losing in this shift. There was a feeling that funders have helped to drive the move to professionalize by requiring the hiring of professionals. A number of respondents expressed concerns about professionalization. Respondents saw professionalization, and the accompanying bureaucratization, as having a significant impact on the way services have developed, and they sometimes voiced concern that this trend is silencing and excluding those who have experience and a great deal of commitment in the movement to end violence against women. Nonetheless, respondents report that there is a mix of people who have entered the sector on their professional qualifications and those who have been trained through experience. In the final analysis, whether or not they see it as a positive trend, respondents agree that the delivery of violence against women services is being professionalized. There are still important discussions to be had around this potentially sensitive issue.

Given the degree to which funders drive the professionalization of woman abuse services, it would be a sensible investment on their part to provide adequate allocations to organizations for the professional development of their staff. The violence against women sector will benefit from dialogue about what kind of training and professional development is most needed and an examination of current initiatives. Those planning, delivering and evaluating training and professional development opportunities need to pay careful attention to what is being taught to ensure that everyone who is working in the sector has a foundational knowledge of woman abuse and its effects.

Working Towards Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

Respondents spoke about a variety of challenges organizations face in structuring services to become more diverse and inclusive.

A feminist analysis of woman abuse points out the fact of gender inequality and its devastating effects. It is an analysis that questions and challenges cultural norms of how power is distributed. Inevitably, it is an analysis that will meet with resistance. The work of coalition building requires compromise and searching for common ground. The LCCEWA has been enormously successful in marking common ground with the mainstream institutions of Canadian society. As Canadian society diversifies, the challenge is to continue seeking common ground with individuals and organizations new to Canada.

Organizations are recognizing the need to diversify their staff and to provide services to the diversity of communities that make up our society. Across Languages has been working with violence against women services for many years to provide ethical and confidential interpreting. Across Languages is an important bridge between violence against women services and diverse communities. Domestic violence training is provided to all interpreters whether they expect to do this work or not.

In 1992, the Multicultural Committee was formed as a subcommittee of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Now disbanded, this committee represented a significant effort to build bridges with a variety of culturally and ethnically diverse communities. Members of the committee got training from agencies, learned about their visions and missions and met staff, volunteers and clients. Respondents who had participated in the Multicultural Committee spoke of being situated between the often-divergent views of women's anti-violence agencies and newcomer communities.

Many respondents spoke of the difficulty of getting caught between conflicting value systems. It is essential not only to acknowledge that we are working with sometimes-conflicting value systems, but also to respect the right of others to have values that conflict with ours. This calls for respect in the face of disagreement. Openness and a willingness to learn and be flexible will be immeasurably helpful in promoting dialogue. One respondent noted how bridging cultural values could lead to designing services differently. Respondents discussed the fact that even in developing culturally sensitive services a diversity of approaches is needed and that we cannot assume that the needs of each community will be the same.

The Muslim Family Safety Project is engaged in work to promote dialogue and collaboration between the Muslim Community and main stream services to address violence against women and children. The project has made encouraging progress and has experienced a great deal of support from multiple locations in the community. It is an example of how we can work to bridge cultural differences.

Community Resource Centres

Although they are often absent from the tables where violence against women is discussed, Community Centres offer a variety of supports to abused women. As one respondent said of the programs at a Community Centre, "All services relate in some way to abused women."

These Centres offer programming for women and their children. They do some parent-child programs. They organize community outings and meet people in informal ways. They may also meet with women on an individual basis for help with anything from toilet training to making connections in the community. Relationship building is an important part of the work of Community Centres.

A respondent from one Community Centre listed the following programs, "We have a Well Baby and Well Child Clinic, parent-child literacy, a drop-in for breakfast, a pre-school that requires registration, but not an intake process; we have three hundred and

fifty kids in an after school program. We have a volunteer program. There is a Youth Worker that does recreational activities with teenagers. They have decorated their own space. The Youth Worker will do individual counselling as needed. We run a young moms' group. We have beginning level ESL classes, a clothing exchange, baby food bank, employment centre and computers. We can help with other basic needs, emergency food kits, THAW, health access vouchers for something like Tylenol. We have a Family Support Worker who works one-on-one with women; many are single moms. Many have relationship issues; most have OW problems, furniture problems. We have a collective kitchen and groups for women, senior women, parenting groups. We provide information and referral."

The work of Community Centres is very complimentary to the work of the Violence Against Women sector, "This work is addressing violence of the social isolation and Post-Traumatic Stress. It is a community development approach that builds trust, builds relationships. It teaches people to identify their problems and the sources of their problems and what they can begin to do about them. It brings people together and offers them a chance to give to the community, as well as to receive from the community."

Working Towards an Integrated Approach

Both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse exist to promote better collaboration between organizations that work with abused women and children and abusive men. They understand the value of good communication and cooperation and spend considerable time and expend considerable resources attempting to improve that. Respondents described a multitude of creative partnerships that are at work in our community. Refer to page 110.

As policy makers and funding bodies play such a large role in the way work and responsibilities are divided, it is essential that they consult with those who are delivering services.

The Rural Context

Respondents acknowledged that women in the county have a much harder time accessing services than those in London. Representatives of some agencies and institutions acknowledged that they cannot offer the same range of services in Middlesex County as they do in London. Others noted that they provide the same range of services, but not the same depth. It was pointed out that sometimes limitations are dictated by funders because, "There is an assumption that it costs the same to deliver services in the city and the county, but in fact it costs more to work in the county."

Each community has a different mix of funding and services. A lot of services in Middlesex County are primarily related to the five employment resource centres funded by Human Resources and Skill Development Canada. Efforts are being made to take services farther out into the county, but the fact remains that there are certain pockets in county where people are struggling. Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Lucan, Glencoe, Mount Brydes, Melborne, Poplar Hill, Thedford, Arcona, Watford, Wardsville and Newbury were all named as areas that are under-serviced.

Problems with transportation were a recurrent theme in discussions with people from the county. Some women would prefer to come to London for confidentiality reasons. Others have to come to London because services are not available elsewhere in the county. For those without transportation, getting into London or getting to another part of the county is a problem, leaving them with restricted options or, sometimes, no options at all. For the most part, each agency is trying to deal with its transportation problems in isolation and is using internal resources when they are available. The Children's Aid Society has had to provide transportation for children to their Community Group Treatment Program. Their experience helps to illustrate some of the challenges in organizing transportation in rural Middlesex County. They are not just financial.

A transportation committee to address transportation issues in Strathroy and surrounding communities, called 'The Driving Force,' was set up in 2001. It is looking at models in other areas to see if something can be set up in Middlesex. Any new initiatives will be for those associated with HRSDC, leaving the majority of abused women and their children still without transportation.

In principle, residents of Middlesex County have the same access to policing and justice services as those in London. In practice, however, there are differences, beginning with services for victims of crime. Transportation is again named as the major barrier for women in the county needing to access the Victim Witness Assistance Program. There are no allocated funds to assist someone from county to get there.

Many women in the rural focus group voiced concern over police response to woman abuse. As noted above there are several Police Services that are responsible for various parts of Middlesex County. Some initiatives are underway to improve the response to woman abuse. For example, there was a local decision to have an OPP Domestic Violence Coordinator in Middlesex County. Although a positive development, the downside is that it doesn't promote the development of expertise for dealing with domestic violence in other officers. Efforts are being made to develop this expertise in other officers, beginning with one on each platoon.

Women who have to work out custody and access agreements and/or obtain support payments from abusive ex-partners are at a definite disadvantage in Middlesex County. There are no lawyers working in the county outside of London that take legal aid clients for family issues.

While mandatory child protection services may be readily available, awareness of and access to more innovative programming such as the Community Group Treatment Program for children who have witnessed violence and their mothers is more restricted in remote areas. As well, there are no supervised access points for parents whose children are in CAS care, posing a serious obstacle for parents trying to maintain a relationship with their children and for children who want to continue seeing a parent from whom they have been separated.

Several respondents expressed concern over restricted access to women's shelters in Middlesex County. As with many other services, the shelter intended to serve county residents is located in Strathroy. Women's Rural Resource Centre will help women get to their shelter in Strathroy, but that does not solve all of the problems that women will continue to face in living far from home with no transportation.

At the same time that shelter workers at the Women's Rural Resource Centre face extra challenges in assisting the women they serve, they must work with fewer resources and diminished opportunities to access better resources. A lack of resources makes providing necessary training difficult. The situation leaves that shelter with a long list of services that they would like to be able to provide but cannot and complicates efforts to provide twenty-four-hour services.

Unfortunately, there is little to report on childcare services in Middlesex County. Respondents summed up the situation very succinctly; there are none. This lack of childcare services was named by women who have experienced abuse and respondents alike as one of the most significant barriers women face in leaving and staying out of abusive relationships.

Counselling was another area of difficulty. Agencies that do provide counselling are limited to short term counselling. This is adequate for some women, but not for others. And with the scant resources available to them, they are not able to provide advocacy for housing and legal services. Often a woman cannot fully benefit from counselling until these needs have been adequately met. Respondents also noted a lack of therapists in private practice and psychiatrists who are sensitive to violence against women. And even when the counselling services exist, women face the recurring problems of finding transportation and protecting confidentiality.

Housing, as mentioned above, is a serious problem. There is a lack of housing in rural areas, including emergency housing. This restricts people's opportunities to stay in Strathroy or other communities in Middlesex County. Affordable housing is critical to a woman's ability to stay out of an abusive relationship. Many times a woman will not even consider leaving if she knows in advance that she will not be able to obtain housing. This is an area that requires immediate attention from all levels of government.

Respondents affirmed that cuts to social services have impacted clients tremendously. They noted that people get trapped in a desperate struggle just to survive. Changes to Ontario Works, such as the imposition of a mandatory work, have also posed complications for women. Ontario Works has not responded to these concerns and is leaving many people, but especially abused women, extremely vulnerable economically. For a woman who identifies herself as leaving an abusive relationship, some barriers to accessing OW may be removed, but OW does not screen for woman abuse in Middlesex County.

Currently, education is also a real barrier to women's ability to lead lives free from violence. Educational opportunities in rural communities are quite limited. Women need

services to enable them to safely upgrade their education. A woman's level of education plays an important role in her ability to sustain herself and her family and to live free from an abusive relationship.

Confidentiality, as has been mentioned, is a serious concern for women in county. Women can't trust that their confidentiality will be respected because they often know people who are working in the services, and when clients do understand that their confidentiality will be respected, they fear that they will be seen by a neighbour. Even group counselling is difficult to deliver because of close community connections and a reluctance to meet people who are known in counselling. This can leave women with the feeling that there is no one to go to if they are being abused. Working to broadly educate communities that it is abusers who must be held accountable for their violent behaviour may help to alleviate women's unwillingness to be identified as someone who has experienced woman abuse.

Other areas of difficulty raised by respondents included the scarcity of group supports, a problem that is compounded by a lack of safe spaces where confidentiality can be preserved to run groups, poor health care services, a lack of services for youth and young women in particular, a lack of services for abusive men and a lack of services for the small Portuguese and Mennonite communities.

There was also some discussion of the more traditional values that one encounters in county and the role the churches can play in reinforcing them. Respondents were, however, careful to point out that a religion or spirituality that in any way condones abuse is a bastardization of religion and spirituality. It was also noted that attitudes towards women are evolving, along with the role of the church. Still, respondents counselled care and balance in approaching rural communities.

Currently, there are five Multi-Service Centres in Middlesex County, funded primarily through HRSDC. The intent of these Centres is to allow someone to come in and access several different services and agencies. Several of these Centres are already involved in addressing woman abuse. These multipurpose centres are one model of service delivery. Because they can provide infrastructure support, they can be a cost-effective way of bringing a greater range of services to various parts of the county. Many respondents pointed out, however, that this sort of model cannot be considered a panacea for the problems of availability of and accessibility to woman abuse services in Middlesex County.

Whatever model is implemented to address these issues, there was consensus that there is a need to improve transportation and childcare and that resources to meet these needs can't come from within existing agency budgets.

The idea of having a coordinating service offering free and confidential transportation and childcare for clients of all social service agencies was raised. It could function with a network of volunteer drivers, who are reimbursed only for their costs. It would require a

central number to call in order to arrange for a ride and childcare if needed. This sort of solution calls for funding in order to sustain it.

Other ideas included making funds available to women so that they can access buses or cabs to get to services or providing funds to the staff of agencies so that they can meet women in safe places that are also accessible to the women they are seeing.

Addressing the Imbalances of Service in London and Rural Middlesex County

A primary goal of this report was to examine the inequities in service provision that exist between London and the surrounding rural areas of Middlesex County. The section focusing on 'The Rural Context' does that. That section also contains the seeds of many ideas for beginning to address those inequities. But before we can begin to effectively work towards improving access to service for abused women and their children in the rural areas, a fundamental shift must take place. London-based service providers and decision makers, who control many of the available resources and who control the flow of those resources, must accept responsibility for serving all of Middlesex County. The current structures reinforce the geographic isolation of rural-based services and the urban-rural divide.

What Do Women Who Have Experienced Violence Think?

Two focus groups were held, one with women who had accessed services through an agency in London and one with women who had accessed service through Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy. Women were invited to talk about what they saw as gaps in service, based on their own experiences. Refer to page 147.

What to Do? Recommendations

In putting these ideas together, I have thought about the theory that we make better decisions collectively than we do individually. The richness of perspective evident throughout this report makes it clear why that would be true. Still collective decision making is a challenging process. Finding a respectful balance of power in our decision making processes will make it easier to speak to one another and to listen to one another.

As the author of this report, I have just two recommendations;

1. Be conscious of power and try to use it respectfully when you are involved in decision making processes.
2. Keep talking to each other. You have many creative and insightful ideas and a wealth of experience to compliment them.

This report contains thoughts and observations as they were presented to me. The recommendations below are summarized. The full texts from which I drew these recommendations are included in the body of the report. There is a clear consensus that we have to work with each other. The report contains information about how we are doing that and how we might do that in new ways. These are ideas and experiences that

ought to give shape to discussions, inform decisions and prompt new processes. Some of these recommendations are within the purview of those who sit at the tables of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Others are not, but may be brought forward to appropriate policy makers. Not all of the answers are in the recommendations. Many fine analyses and suggestions for moving forward are contained in the thoughts and observations presented throughout this report.

I have divided recommendations into categories, with some hesitation because the categories cross over. The boundaries of our work are fluid.

Education

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Allocate funding to support the implementation of the Safe Schools Act. Fully fund violence prevention work in all Boards of Education across the Province. Stop expecting Boards of Education to fund violence prevention initiatives from existing budgets.
- Support female-centred education, put books written and published by women in classrooms.

Recommendations for the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario

- Provide mandatory education on teaching violence prevention at the Teacher College level, which includes teaching on how to create a relationship with students to talk about violence and healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Provide education to teachers about how witnessing and/or experiencing violence impacts learning.
- Conduct a longitudinal research study to evaluate the effectiveness of providing graduating teachers with education on violence prevention and the effects of witnessing and/or experiencing violence on learning.

Recommendations for the Thames Valley District School Board, Educators and Community-Based Organizations

- Ensure that violence prevention education starts with children as soon as they enter school and continues until they graduate.
- Continue to foster coordinated partnerships between community-based services and the Education sector to create multidimensional strategies for learning about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Integrate this learning

into the classroom and the school culture, through translating it into educational experiences.

- Work with youth rather than kicking them out of school. Explore alternatives such as family-group conferencing that bring together the victim, the perpetrators and the families to try to come to some sort of resolution and reparation. If having the family present is not feasible or not helpful, try having peers present as peers are often involved in making changes.
- Eliminate barriers for homeless kids in a shelter or trying to live independently after a shelter to get into school. If they can't go to school, the chances that they will end up in prison increase dramatically.
- Teach knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours about healthy relationships and understanding violence in relationships through various modalities of learning. Offer multidimensional ways of learning to support integration and internalization of the messages. Use value driven, holistic approaches that engage students both cognitively and emotionally
- Make sensitizing students on the issue of sexual harassment part of the curriculum design.
- Develop more violence prevention programs that meet curriculum needs. Provide scripted programs and introduce a language for the teacher delivering the programs.
- Encourage girls to get a good education. Work to counter socialization, especially that which occurs through the media, to sexualize girls and women.
- Spend time, effort and money in prevention work and on offender treatment work.
- Provide education to abused women about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Help them to identify abuse and to learn about their right to live a life free from violence.

Women and Their Children

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the London City Council

- Provide more daycare in both informal and formal settings.
- Establish storefront daycare centres, where mothers can leave their children for short periods of time and get a break for a nominal fee.

- Provide more opportunities for women to interact with each other and other kids. Give mothers access to good parenting role models. Let them learn by interacting with others who have good parenting skills.
- Provide more opportunities for women who experience abuse to engage in recreational and leisure activities, to counter their sense of being trapped in an economic and social space where they see no alternatives to being in an abusive relationship.
- Provide more opportunities for children whose mothers have been abused, especially those that have low incomes, to engage in extracurricular activities.
- Increase the available support and respite for families in crisis that can't keep their families together.
- Provide supportive transitional housing for women who have experienced abuse where they have access to health care, counselling, life skills training, employment retraining, continuing education, childcare, addictions counselling and parenting programs.
- Provide adequate financial supports to women who have experienced abuse. The women who are most successful at getting out of abusive situations have support systems and financial resources.

Youth

Recommendation for the Government of Ontario

- Address the gap in services for fourteen to sixteen-year-olds. Either establish services for this age group or lower the age of intake for existing services.

Alternative Service Delivery

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Consult with the community to examine and explore how to deliver services effectively and cost-effectively. Ask; what would work best in this community?
- Have more transitional support workers working in shelters. Offer women options other than extending their stays in shelters by providing advocacy and assistance in navigating all the systems they must deal with when they leave shelter.

- Provide support to abused men through transitional support workers, offering referral and consultation with other community services where appropriate.
- Help families to deal with stress by offering more free and inexpensive community-based recreational programs. This can help to alleviate the isolation that exacerbates the problem of violence against women and children.
- Create more community-based programs for the development of healthy families. Develop preventative programs to help families before they get into crisis.
- Support women's economic autonomy and independence.

Recommendations for Community Based Organizations

- Make services more accessible by setting them up in easy to reach locations and by sending workers out into the community more, rather than always expecting those in need of service to come into an office.
- Work with a harm reduction approach. Offer the same advocacy and support to abused women who do not want to come into shelter. This is particularly important for newcomer women and other women such as lesbians who tend not to use shelter services.
- Engage men in this work to end violence against women and children. Give men an opportunity to reach out to other men to help to keep women safe.
- Think about our services and how we deliver them. Possibilities include; an on-site woman abuse advocate in every community neighbourhood centre, childcare on site at all services, programs that are not stigmatizing, a woman abuse advocate in every library.
- Work with the people that surround abused women. Most abused women's primary support and information comes from friends and families.
- Build capacity in churches and faith based groups to support abused women.
- Build community as well as agencies.
- Provide ongoing support through mentoring. Identify opportunities to meet people where they are at and offer them role models.

Community Centres

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London

- Reinststate core funding for Community Resource Centres.
- Ensure that programs that break the isolation for women and other vulnerable members of the community are supported in the current City of London plans to expand Community Centres. Every neighbourhood should have a neighbourhood centre. The City has a Master Plan that is focused on recreation. It looks at providing large physical structures, but overlooks the needs of the most marginalized.
- Assist Community Centres to meet the rising costs of programming. They help to build capacity in neighbourhoods and in people, especially where poverty is a big problem.

Aboriginal Communities

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the Government of the City of London and Community-Based Organizations

- Let aboriginal people take the lead in aboriginal communities. Remember the words of *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*; “The rebalancing of political and economic power between Aboriginal nations and other Canadian governments represents the core of the hundreds of recommendations contained in this report. Unless accompanied by a rebalancing of power, no progress can be made on other fronts without perpetuating the status quo. The effects of the past will not be undone overnight.”²
- Explore the possibility of training and supporting a first response team of community volunteers to respond to woman abuse on reserves.
- Use At^lohsa to facilitate of a process between trusted community members and local police services to develop community protocols.
- Provide Police Services with cultural training about Aboriginal peoples, their values and their history.
- Support Aboriginal communities in their efforts to help their members resolve grief. Much rage results from limited or no accountability for intergenerational trauma.

² *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, (Volume 5 - *Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment. 1 - Laying the Foundations of a Renewed Relationship 1. A New Beginning* http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/skml_e.html)

Diverse Communities

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and Community-Based Organizations

- Provide support to new immigrants to adapt to new cultural norms. Immigrant families often have new roles in Canada. They have to deal with unfamiliar customs. Men and women need support to adapt.
- Don't make newcomers fit the program. Adapt models to meet the needs of other communities. Plan culturally specific programs. Work within belief systems and cultural norms. It could be something as simple as choosing a time that fits into community routines.
- Build the cost of interpreting into our services. Follow the lead of big companies that think the cost of interpreting should be built into the cost of their products.
- Research the situation of newcomers in London.
- Engage people that know the community. The value of immigrants working with immigrants is that they have the background understanding of cultural issues.
- Set up fun groups that can serve many purposes; that can break isolation. Let women talk while they are baking, it's not always necessary to tackle the issue directly.
- Make use of available community resources like MAROC, whose mandate is to increase access to social services in London to members of diverse and minority communities. They will help to develop policies and work plans. They can help with the change process, with tools, videos, models for policies. They can help you to evaluate where you are at.

Coordination

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Reach out in ways that encourage people to work together to ensure that everyone is safe.
- Review the membership of the LCCEWA. Our community has grown and changed since it was established. Community agencies like Glen Cairn and LUSO didn't exist. John Howard was never invited to be part of LCCEWA. Sometimes non-members have felt excluded from information sessions and committees.

- Encourage connections and networking with a range of community groups. Community work is meant to supplement emergency services. We have narrowed the definition of abuse and the definition of service for abused women.
- Develop intercultural relationships and understanding. There are a lot of cultural groups that don't have an agency but have a leader that could be at the table.
- Look at how do we put theory into practice. Sit together and do actual case reviews, from CAS, VAW, police and the Crown. Perhaps also have consumers sitting at the table.
- Go back to what we know works; women talking to each other and really listening. Don't lose what we've learned.
- Continue to collaborate. Think beyond outcomes and pathologizing.
- Create separate community protocols for woman abuse and sexual violence. There is some overlap, but we are not always dealing with the same problems.
- Cross appoint representatives to the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the Early Years Council. This could facilitate a reporting relationship that lets each sector know what's important for the other group to know about.
- Cultivate relationships with leaders of agencies that have a mandate that goes beyond addressing violence against women and the LCCEWA. A team of direct and indirect services representatives enriches learning.

Longer Term Supports

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Invest five or six years of good services into women who are sexually abused as children. Help them get them education, retraining and sustained counselling. Sexual abuse is a complex problem and it is intergenerational. A therapist reported seeing the daughters of women who she counselled for sexual abuse. Child abuse destroys the foundation of everything. It takes two generations to heal. After they have been to counselling, many women need life skills and parenting support.
- Understand that women abuse and child abuse are not separate issues. Women often leave when children are abused. It may be a couple of years after a woman leaves that she uncovers her own abuse.

- Invest in an integrated three to five year plan to support women to leave abusive relationships. Conduct a longitudinal research study to follow these women. Show that it will work.
- Provide long term program funding. Women who have been abused have deep-standing issues that will take a long time to address. We can't meet real needs with projects with short-term outcomes.

Income Support

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Give women help with basic needs and provide social support. Economics are the biggest challenge. If women have their heat turned off and they are at the food bank and they can't get any more food, all the counselling in the world won't help. They may have to get back into an abusive relationship to get the basics. They become very embittered. They feel hopeless.
- Eliminate the claw-back of the national child tax benefit for women receiving assistance through Ontario Works.
- Recognize that ex-spouses who have been abusive partners may not pay support payments to women on Ontario Works. Ex-spouses should make payments directly to Ontario Works so that women are not penalized if payments are not made.
- Ensure that we are not reinforcing the idea that people living in poverty can't expect much. Return calls promptly, tell women what they are eligible for.

Housing

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London

- Provide geared-to-income housing that is not ghettoized. Affordable and safe places for women and their children to live just don't exist. A lack of affordable housing, especially for women who aren't educated and who don't have jobs push women into the sex industry or into criminal activity in order to survive.
- Provide more Second Stage Housing so that stays can be extended. For many women a year is not long enough. It's not time to settle legal and custody issues, to find affordable housing near good schools for their kids. One woman recently moved out of Second Stage after three years. It turned out to be the best thing she could have done. When she left she was ready to go and her kids were ready. She was forty. A supportive dentist

gave her new teeth and she was able to smile. She had her face smashed in so many times and had received such poor health care because she was low income that she had no teeth left. She has a severely disabled child in his twenties. She had programs that had to be set up for him; he went from youth to adult programs. When he left, he was actually saying words. She would have ended up back in shelter if she had left sooner. There's a woman that needed the service a little longer. A provider asserts; "I would love to be able to house the senior women we have until they leave this earth."

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Tell women they should be picky about their housing. Some women have been told, 'Beggars can't be choosers.' They deserve safe affordable housing near green space and good schools for their kids.

Work

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Let people receiving Ontario Disability Support Payments or Ontario Works work for a few hours a week to supplement their income. People feel that they want to contribute. There are many people who can't do full time work. They are employable part-time or employable with a support person, but they could never work forty hours a week. Some of them are also trying to raise children. Give encouragement and room to earn small amounts of money and let them keep it. It would help people with their self-esteem. They would model working for their kids. All or nothing doesn't work.
- Recognize abuse as a barrier to work. Provide employment-related supports, skill development and advocacy and training for women who have experienced abuse. Provide sensitivity training to the staff of employment agencies.

Health Care

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Provide primary health care in shelters for women. Perhaps set up a residency rotation or nurse practitioner through the Intercommunity Health Centre. This could serve all the shelters collectively. A nurse practitioner could accompany the public health nurse from the Family Abuse Prevention Project.
- Provide primary health care via nurse practitioners in Community Centres. There are two groups of women; those in shelters and those in the

community. Those in the community are more vulnerable. They are not connected.

- Give women in shelters drug benefits, access to birth control and vouchers for non-prescription drugs for things like Tylenol, cough medicine and calamine lotion.
- Maintain drug cards and bus passes for women even through Ontario Works overpayments.

Mental Health

Recommendation for the Government of Ontario

- Put a woman abuse specialist on mental health teams in the hospital.

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Work closely with mental health agencies. Make efforts to provide services for women through one agency. Either have staff come to one agency or provide transportation money when needed.
- Continue to work with the mental health and addictions sectors to understand the links to woman abuse.
- Provide education on trauma to all these sectors. The gap is not sector-specific, and general training would save money. The resources to develop this training do exist within the community.

Training

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Create a bar admission course on domestic violence and child sexual abuse. There is some place for woman abuse training in law school, but many law graduates do not do criminal law or family law. It may be useful to provide a universal course. It would be an overview at best. It may also help potential lawyers to decide whether or not they are prepared to deal with woman abuse.
- Provide diversity training to all Police Services to enable them to respond appropriately to diverse cultures.
- Reinstate funding for joint training between the Children's Aid Society and the Violence Against Women sector. Child protection workers are social workers first. This training helps to reinforce the values of the work. It fosters cooperation, making it easier to work together to meet needs of

women and children. Participation should be determined community by community.

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Provide woman abuse training for maintenance staff and property managers at London Housing.
- Provide woman abuse training with staff from LEADS Employment and Training Centre.
- Recognize that there is a huge variance in the comfort levels of many service providers and the specialists. Assist all workers to the point where they are comfortable hearing disclosures and making a referral.
- Address the tension between wanting to train other professionals and the tendency to want to claim exclusive expertise through open dialogue.

Funding

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London and all funding agencies

- Women are connected to the federal, provincial and municipal governments. All levels of government must play a role in providing support. The issue belongs to everyone.
- Recognize that there are some things that will not pay for themselves in the short term, but that we must do them anyway for the social good. Begin to think about and plan for long term change that will slowly ease the financial burden of caring for people who have been left marginalized and powerless and that will reduce the societal costs that result from violence, poverty and social exclusion.
- Create more flexibility around funding mandates. For example, HRSDC funds employment training, without recognizing that needs are more fluid. Avoid a compartmentalization of service delivery.
- Provide core funding for programs in Community Centres. They are helping women to lead healthier lives. They provide a wide range of care and emotional support. Currently much of this work is project-funded.
- Make the conditions and expectations for grant funding more realistic. Allow applicants to work for modest outcomes, recognizing that social change is a complex and time consuming process. This will help to level the playing field for smaller organizations that are competing with larger organizations that are able to make bigger claims for change. Make

allowance for reasonable administrative costs. Do not impose unrealistic expectations of sustainability and volunteer involvement after grants end.

- Recognize that even when partnerships can provide opportunities for low-cost programming, the overhead costs of providing space for running the programs remains.
- Fund easy-to-get small grants to develop collaborative relationships. Allow for the administrative expenses of building collaborative relationships. Recognize the added expenses for rural and small agencies.
- Return to the recommendations of the legal aid review of a few years ago. It was determined that we need to keep the certificate model, but we are moving more towards clinic models. Technically the clinic could represent the abuser and the abused, and the women may not go there if they think there is a chance their partner could go there. It would be a conflict of interest to serve both.

Recommendation for Community-Based Organizations

- Learn from private sector institutions without violating the integrity of the work to prevent, stop and end violence against women and children.

Government

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Explore options for organizing how funding flows to the violence against women sector. Consolidating everything dealing with woman abuse in one ministry is one possibility. Creating an inter-ministerial committee, not necessarily at the highest level, but including those that are involved in the work is another. A better structure for internal communication is needed.
- Seek out opportunities for more coordination at the ministerial level. Ministries, including the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Ontario Women's Directorate have different perspectives on service delivery.
- Focus on the gendered nature of violence. When we use the concept of 'victim,' we don't recognize that the majority of clients in the majority of programs for victims are women abused in relationships. Continue efforts to understand woman abuse from a feminist perspective.
- Consult with agencies, especially small agencies and those working in rural areas, before flowing new funding to ensure that services will be organized in ways that will optimally meet the needs of the community.

Recommendations for the Government of the City of London

- Cities have a lot to do with meeting the needs of the population. In many cities around the world, people don't need transportation. There are small shops for shopping, not malls. Some newcomer seniors have never been to the mall. Plan new development in ways that promote self sufficient neighbourhoods.

Decision Making

Recommendations for all who work to prevent, stop and end violence against women and children

- Clarify and understand the values we are working with. Revisit them occasionally.
- Don't let the challenges conquer and divide us in this work.
- Move forward with real interest and real caring. Everything is slow. Start with what we have.
- Move forward in innovative ways, without replicating what has always been done. Meet the challenge of keeping the gains and the accomplishments and discard what doesn't work. Let go of what doesn't serve human need. Set the tone of the work, don't be in reactive mode.
- Get time and space away from crisis management for reflection and to think and talk about planning.
- Look at multiple strategies to recover the caring capacity of our society. Currently the number of people needing services outstrips the number of caregiver hours available.
- Remember where we have come from and what has been accomplished and what is still left to do.

INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of interviews and focus groups conducted between August 2003 and September 2004. The purpose of the report is to examine gaps in service, especially as they pertain to the rural area of Middlesex County. I felt it would be important to contextualize the gaps in services in the rural areas of Middlesex County by examining the availability of rural services against a background of those available in London, the urban centre of the county.

I have been supported in this work by an Advisory Committee, whose current members include Wendy Arnott, Kim Betteridge, Colleen Montgomery, Kate Wiggins and Mary Pinder. Betty Matos and Bev Lumsden were past members.

I interviewed most members of both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse. I also interviewed other service providers and professionals whom respondents and my Advisory Committee suggested could be helpful. In total, I conducted sixty-four interviews and five focus groups. Every individual with whom I spoke has contributed something to this report. Individuals who wished to be named in the report and the organizations they represent are included in *Appendix 1*. Women who have experienced woman abuse and who participated in two focus groups have not been named individually.

There are voices missing from this report. The more people I interviewed, the easier it was to see who else should be included. I was faced with an ever broadening circle of interveners and the need to draw a boundary so that this report could be written. The boundary was arbitrary and was determined by restrictions of time and energy, not interest. I apologize to those who could have added to this discussion, but did not get a chance.

What is presented in the following pages is a snapshot of the movement to end violence against women in London and Middlesex County at a particular point in time. As the report has evolved, I have come to see it as a facilitated discussion between people who work with abused women and their children and/or men who abuse. Much as I have tried to truly represent the voices of those with whom I spoke, I take final responsibility for the views and perspectives presented here.

The experts cited here work in different ways, in different settings, in different sectors and professions. I think that an exchange of perspectives and insights and ideas may be a fruitful way to improve our responses. We are all working for the safety of women and children, and as one respondent reminds us;

To achieve what we have never achieved, we must do what we have never done.

FINDING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF WOMAN ABUSE

“Beyond the Power and Control Wheel is a relational model of understanding the world, where we value the feminine again. Abusive men exist in a toxic environment where they are separated from their own femininity and therefore separated from themselves. This limits their own perspective of their choices for action.”

The Power and Control Wheel

Do we all have the same definition of woman abuse? Do we all use the same theoretical framework for identifying and analyzing the effects of woman abuse? Because the respondents in this study work in such varied settings, it seemed important to find out if there is some common ground that we all stand on as we respond to those with experiences of woman abuse. My first thought was to ask respondents if they have a feminist understanding of woman abuse, but it soon became clear that “feminist” is itself a term that has different meanings for different people. Instead, I asked respondents if they use the Power and Control Wheel as a basis for understanding woman abuse. This tool was first developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota in 1986. (See *Appendix 1* for a sample copy.) The City of Kent Washington offers this explanation of the Power and Control Wheel;

The Power and Control Wheel was developed after interviewing battered women in support groups and men in batterers’ groups. The women were asked to identify the ways in which they felt they were controlled, and the men were asked to identify what tactics they used to maintain an environment of fear and control (Pence, 1987).

At the centre of the Wheel is the intention – the purpose – of all the abusive tactics – to establish power and control. Each spoke of the Wheel represents a particular tactic (i.e. economic abuse, threats, and intimidation). The rim of the Wheel that holds it together is physical abuse and the threat of violence (Pence, 1987).

Tactics of abuse involve a variety of behaviours ranging from degrading remarks, cruel jokes, economic exploitation, punches, kicks, threats, false imprisonment, sexual abuse, suffocating actions, choking, maiming assaults and homicide (Pence, 1987).

The wheel is important because it defines woman abuse as an attempt to have power over and control of a woman.

Most, but not all respondents, acknowledged using the Power and Control Wheel as the basis of their understanding of woman abuse. A few comments show the range of applications for this tool;

Yes we use the Power and Control Wheel with clients to teach and normalize abuse. We also use the equality wheel.

We get this in training. We also get it through contact with the community. We use it as background when interviewing victims.

We even use it in home visits. With Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, woman abuse is a risk factor to consider.

Probation and Parole does use the wheel to understand domestic violence. I did use the wheel in my training five years ago.

Philosophically, yes, so that staff would be able to have a good understanding and an ability to work with women and children from environments of domestic violence.

Organizations that the United Way funds use it.

We do use the Power and Control Wheel. It is now being adopted and used around the province. Police are trying to take direction from the community.

Yes I use the Power and Control Wheel and feminist analysis.

I use a feminist analysis and a holistic client-centred approach. This is a non-medical model.

A few respondents, none of whom were members of the Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse, were not familiar with it. They expressed openness to learning about it, in the hope that it would be helpful when they work with abused women;

I'd be interested in the possibility of a half-hour presentation on the Power and Control Wheel at a networking meeting of similar agencies.

I don't use the wheel, but I am interested. I could use it in my course.

Some respondents reported that they use the wheel, but that not everyone in their organization does;

It's dependant upon background and exposure of individual social workers and supervisors.

We have block training every year and it has been used, but it's not mandatory. It's not regularly relied upon or used. I am aware of it, but I have different background, a social work background. When Police train Domestic Violence Coordinators, they bring in other agencies to explain how they can assist the police.

I am familiar with the Power and Control Wheel. Maintenance staff and property managers should do training around that. It has been identified as a need. We have

talked about it. Client Services tend to get more opportunities for professional development.

Formal training is not provided; we work with staff to understand the situation of abused women.

I would use the Power and Control Wheel in a presentation, but would focus more on the law. I might use this with victim services. I don't think Community Service Officers are trained to deal with questions that might arise from the Power and Control Wheel. Some parts of wheel apply to policing and some don't. Some CSO officers might feel more comfortable partnering with a community agency.

The majority of the organization does use the wheel. It is heavily embedded in social work and nursing, and at its weakest with the physicians. This is part of the dialogue that happens in the organization.

It has been taught to supervisors and in refresher training. Some are more sensitive than others.

Yes. In government you have the bureaucrats' view vs. the politicians' view. Certainly bureaucrats up to the ADM would have a feminist understanding of woman abuse. Current politicians are being educated.

I use a feminist analysis that is woman-centred. Sometimes I get a reaction and I have to unpack it.

Two responses seemed to indicate that elements of the Power and Control Wheel were being used;

We use 'choice theory.' It is a woman's choice to live with an abusive partner or to leave. We can warn and give options, but not make her decisions for her.

Even if we can't accept the subtlety of the Power and Control Wheel, there are some things that we are going to teach.

And finally, there was a set of respondents that use the Power and Control Wheel along with other theoretical frameworks;

I do use the Power and Control Wheel. I am also aware of other theories. I have had to adapt it so that it is appropriate for students.

There is a spiritual dimension to this area, and if you understand that, you know what needs to be done. That spirituality is interpreted in different ways by different people. When you look at what I believe religious faith is about; it's about your relationship to God and to others. This whole area is about relationships.

We operate with spiritual values. These are values that are congruent with feminism. They recognize the sanctity of life. This really fits for me. I want to feel connected to something bigger.

Yes, we use it. We are an eclectic and interdisciplinary group of people come together with different perspectives; feminists, social workers, criminologists and mental health workers. We also use an ecological framework. Within the ecological context, individuals are situated in families that live in a context. You look at the family, victimization, and whether services are available or not available. Each person is an individual; each individual has a different framework of understanding, a holistic way of understanding what is happening. Technically, we are a mental health facility, but we don't slide into pathologizing. We look at cultures. There is a bias in the referral mechanism. Most people don't come out of choice. We look at the decision making that brings people here. We must look at decision makers' decisions and resources, and when that changes, your clientele changes.

We also have a developmental framework, to understand children and youth of different ages, with different needs. We talk to them differently and use different interventions. We try to find the right fit for clients.

An important critique did emerge about the Power and Control Wheel, highlighting the fact that it was developed and has been used with little attention to how racism intersects with the problem of violence against women;

The Power and Control Wheel does not reflect the power and status that men from other communities have lost through the process of colonization or immigration. There are a whole bunch of people who have been scattered and raised in different conditions, through the disenfranchisement of the Indian Act and through residential schools. But now these people who have been lost are beginning to come home, and they are dealing with layers of problems; being adopted as babies into foreign cultures, etc. These are complex people with multiple problems trying to repatriate. Many find they don't fit in their home communities either. On the streets or in jail is where they end up. Suicide rates are very high. They have no connection. They were forcibly removed.

Maybe for some people, the Power and Control Wheel fits better because they were born and raised in that environment.

A Narrow Definition of Woman Abuse

Some respondents raised the concern that our definition of woman abuse is too narrow;

The definition of abuse in the judicial system, and this includes the police, is still physical abuse. I'm only talking from observations, but people have difficulty understanding the fear. Sometimes the fear may be misplaced, but I have witnessed the control and intimidation. It's one thing to have access to a bank

account, but if a woman gets crap every time she uses it, that's another matter. Can you imagine what it's like to have someone phoning you wherever you are, to face anger if you are late? The accountability many of these women experience is mind boggling. When someone has been terrorized and threatened, that has an impact. I've seen 'the look.' I saw it in court. That is not given enough credence.

Others spoke of the fragmentation of service that goes along with a narrow conception of woman abuse as intimate partner violence. Respondents acknowledged that some women are just in an abusive relationship, but more often than not, women who find themselves in these relationships grew up in a violent home or were emotionally neglected or sexually abused. A counsellor reported that she is now seeing the daughters of women whom she counselled years earlier because they were sexually abused. A narrow definition of woman abuse obscures the connectedness of different forms of violence against women and ignores the fact that the roots of the problem may lie in childhood victimization. It also leads to concentrating resources in efforts to deal with only one piece of an intersecting puzzle.

The Violence Against Women Cross Sectoral Strategy Group has stated that;

There needs to be a significant investment, based on a comprehensive cross-sectoral strategy, that delivers supports and services to deal with the broad range of violence that women experience, including sexual violence, poverty, workplace harassment, elder abuse, racism, violence against women with disabilities and deaf women, as well as abuse by intimate partners.

This sentiment was echoed by many respondents, but strict funding mandates make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to respond holistically to violence against women. We do not design interventions based on experiences of violence across the lifespan of a woman. Our responses are directed towards a specific kind of violence, occurring in a specific context. In this way, we tend to separate responses to physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. We have barely begun to develop responses to abuse occurring in the workplace and we often have no response to gendered abuse that intersects with racism, ageism, ableism or heterosexism.

OUTSIDE THE DEFINITION OF WOMAN ABUSE?

“Sometimes woman abuse gets characterized as domestic violence, sometimes as sexual violence; sexual harassment is sometimes in and sometimes out.”

Many women live with the experience of childhood sexual abuse and many women experience workplace sexual harassment. Sometimes these women also experience intimate partner violence. A respondent explained why it is critically important to make the links between childhood abuse, especially childhood sexual abuse, and the abuse women experience in intimate relationships;

Women who have been sexually abused grow up believing that is the only thing that they deserve. And they frequently get into abusive relationships and they don't even see it. They don't even realize that they are being abused. The abuse is so much a part of their world-view. That is life for them. That is because of what happened to them as children. If they were to answer the question, 'Are you safe in your relationship?' they would say yes. They are being controlled and abused. It's not even clear for them at the beginning; this happens frequently.

Childhood abuse just prepares women to expect the minimum in life. It prepares them for abusive relationships. They often don't see what has happened, and it really determines what they choose in life.

Just paying attention to domestic violence is just paying attention to the later stages of trauma; so much has been missed in the middle. It's another little patch, a band-aid.

A respondent described how women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse may also end up in the health care system, where they can't be helped if the root of their problems is not uncovered;

So many women [who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse] suffer from somatization. That is something that is missed a lot. I see a lot of women that come with a lot of physical pain. Because the system doesn't allow for that expression of pain, they become somatized.³

A respondent noted that a history of childhood abuse makes it difficult for a woman to identify abuse later in life, let alone escape that abuse;

A lot of times we judge, but they don't see the perpetrator as an abuser, but as a person that will support them, and that is all a result of childhood abuse, and especially childhood sexual abuse. A lot of times when they realize they are being

³ For an in depth examination of this issue see: *Sexual Abuse And Physical Symptoms* Morella Yopez-Millon (2002) <http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/Sexualabuseandphysicalsymptoms.pdf>

abused, things are bad, but they have been abused for a long time before and it develops into a very aggressive form of abuse.

Sometimes the goal is that at the end [of her sexual abuse counselling] she will go to the London Abused Women's Centre, but you can't push a woman; she has to make the decision herself. In at least 40 percent of cases, women don't even know they are in abusive relationships. Women are with abusers who have perpetrated against children and they don't even see that as a bad thing. That is trauma. They complain once in a while, but they are dealing with so much in their lives that they prefer to have an abuser as a support person than be alone. They end up with an abuser because they are so isolated because of broken family relationships. Sometimes even losing their children doesn't motivate them to leave.

A respondent emphasized the need for better services for survivors of childhood sexual abuse;

What is happening now is that women who are very badly wounded and traumatized are not getting the service they need, but a lot of money is being spent on services. What is being done now is patch work. These bits and pieces, I see them like little band-aids put on a huge wound.

We have women jumping from service to service when the big issue for survivors is trust. It's not easy jumping from service to service. It takes two to three sessions for assessment, and you only have twelve sessions in total. You have only ten sessions left. Women think, 'Am I supposed to be okay in ten sessions?' It's very unfair.

Women need much more than twelve sessions; they need work on trauma. In ten or twelve sessions you can only work on stage one of trauma healing. How could they open up their trauma in twelve sessions? The woman gets discouraged. She knows she has to wait for six months to go back for service when her twelve sessions are over. A real response to trauma is not there.

When women are overwhelmed by their early traumatic experiences, they may end up in the mental health system, where there is little understanding of the source of their difficulties and, consequently, little in the way of a supportive response;

A woman said to me, 'What I need is a counsellor advocate. My doctor thinks that I am crazy. I just need him to understand that I am crying a lot, but I am not crazy.' She has to go through a hearing with a psychiatrist just to go out [of the hospital.] We need a more feminist environment that will provide long-term care.

The consequences of this system wide gap are costly, with both women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and society at large paying a price;

So much suffering and so much life being wasted and nobody pays attention to that. There are so many women that don't work that are on the system because of trauma. That's what we have with people from Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works, people who have suffered.

You get so used to being on Ontario Works. Women say it doesn't matter that I have to apply for jobs that I can't get just to get my cheque. They accept being humiliated by OW workers just to maintain that [eligibility] status.

A respondent turned her attention to thinking about how to reorganize our response to survivors of childhood sexual abuse;

I think that the big thing that is missing is long-term counselling. We need a more integrated response, with something similar to the trauma unit [at the hospital]. It has to be a well prepared program with different options and approaches.

The trauma unit does research which is very important. You need to do pre-group and post-group interviews to ensure that progress is being made. You need research in order to make sure that you get funding, but at the same time, it has to be a service that is feminist in principle, in approach, in practice.

It needs to be at least two years. Women need two, three, four, five years of building trust with their therapist, working on mindfulness, using EMDR for second stage trauma healing. There should be components so that you can see people moving along. Using techniques like EMDR, you see people progressing. You can see the movement in three sessions. I imagine that could be very helpful with a lot of people.

This doesn't even have to be provided by one service, but by an integration of services. Different agencies could apply for money and put it together in one model.

Recognizing the gaps that exist, both counsellors and women who are survivors find a way to move forward;

Really trauma, a traumatized childhood has so many layers. In two or three years of piecemeal service, we can't work through all of that, but at the same time I see women progressing, even with limited services. I have worked with a woman who has done three groups, but still has a huge amount of unresolved trauma. It's been five years of piecemeal service, but now she is thinking she could begin applying for work. Maybe she could have been doing much more if she had had more integrated service.

The challenge ahead is to support such dedication to healing;

Maybe the government will say, 'Can we really handle that?' But that's what we deal with.

There was only one respondent who spoke about workplace sexual harassment. Her comments are presented below;

I know what's involved when I support women and I can't see how anybody else does it. You have to have knowledge of the Human Rights Code, the Employment Standards Act, how labour contracts work and learned knowledge of the barriers women always face, without fail, when they complain. You have to be familiar with both internal and external remedy processes.

Women may attempt a process within their workplace or use an external remedy process. You have to differentiate between the outcomes and the processes. The remedy process might not have anything to do with a settlement; it might have to do with getting out of there with the least amount of harm.

Women who come to me are women who have experienced processes that have failed or fallen apart. In most cases, women looking for support are women who have already started some kind of complaint process and found that they need help because things are coming apart.

For me, all the women that I've helped, the average amount of time is no less than six months and I have people that I've been with for one and a half years.

Unadvertised, through word of mouth and people getting lucky enough to connect with me and working within my limits of family and working for an income, I was getting 107 contacts per month and putting in 66 – 73 hours per month.

Women can benefit from counselling, but not every woman wants or needs counselling. Counselling can never be seen as a substitute for support and advocacy. The danger is to say we offer counselling and to give the impression that that's enough. It's never enough in and of itself. In my experience, it never provides everything a woman needs.

Generally, women need to hear their options. Most women just don't know what they can do or what their rights are. The support can be anything to do with the internal process. Sometimes this means letting the employer or someone in authority know what's happening,

Women need someone to help assess their situation and give them their options and explain the possible and likely outcomes for each option. So that's what I do. I explore all the internal options with the person, help to craft letters, write outlines of letters for women and trouble shoot and liaise with other people in the workplace, especially in unionized workplaces. There is a lot of work in unionized environments around building trust and relationships. In one situation, the union started out being very resistant to my involvement and now they e-mail me and we talk and work on things together. It's about building bridges between

the woman and her union for better outcomes. It is the same process for any external possibilities.

When a woman comes to me, I always tell her she can contact a lawyer. I've only had one person who contacted a lawyer and didn't continue with me. Most people will choose to go with an advocate. They get understanding and support and belief from me and they get a service elsewhere.

The other piece that women get out of advocacy is empowerment. They learn about their rights. By having other women support them and help them, they put their experience into context and hold other people accountable. It's the female factor; it wouldn't be as empowering if it was a lawyer; it's being in control of your process. The role of an advocate is to get out of the way of the process and let it move forward.

When it comes to the Human Rights Commission, the number one most important thing is to have access to support and advocacy. If you learn what your rights are, your statistical chances of maneuvering through the Commission to a more positive outcome increase dramatically. From staying on the line until you get a person, getting that complaint package sent to you, maneuvering around the section 34s and knowing what your entitlements are to settlement, you need to know your rights.

They will usually tell you about the settlement for pain and suffering, but will not tell you about your right to separate reimbursement for out-of-pocket money you lose for the violation of your human rights.

The other big push from the Commission is for mediation. They promote it as positive that 75 percent of their cases get settled through mediation. It's implicit that if you don't agree to settlement, which is the Commission's preferred way of doing business, you have a very slim chance of surviving the scrutiny needed to get to a tribunal.

My personal challenge is working in isolation. If women are to get this service, they are going to get it from someone who is working as a volunteer. If women get support from an agency, it will be considerably different from what Sharon and I do. Or it's a fee for service and they pay a lawyer.

The other challenge is the language that is used interchangeably by the LCCEWA and the Ontario government. They use the term woman abuse and sexual harassment is always something tacked on at the end.

I find that the work is invisible in the London community. I have no supervision; I have to do all the learning on my own. I have to rely on favours from experts to help me problem solve. It is trauma work and there is a personal cost to doing it. I have to pay for my own counselling.

The more I do this, the more I realize there should be training. I should be so much more trained than I am. There is definitely a correlation between women who experience sexual harassment and a personal history of other forms of violence. There are deep psychological and emotional needs that I can see, but because they are focused on a workplace situation, that is where they are putting their attention.

The needs are so deep. They are presented through a workplace incident, but that doesn't mean that's all the advocate needs to deal with. That points to that advocate needing a personal support network, a team and professional training to continue to meet the demands and the needs of the women.

There is a bit of an illusion that legal clinics deal with these issues, but that isn't true. They will deal with workers comp or rental claim issues that may be linked to harassment situations, but nothing beyond that. Sometimes legal clinics are used as referrals. There is an illusion among service providers that they can help because I get women who say so and so told me to call this legal clinic, or women put out e-mails saying, 'Do you know that this service gives out free legal advice?' But it's never for this issue.

If you have lawyers who agree to work pro bono or funds to pay them, you can organize legal workshops. The Chatham-Kent Sexual Assault Crisis Centre did that with Geri Sanson [a Toronto-based lawyer.] Or use Judith Potter's model [a London-based lawyer who works in women's shelters and services for abused women] and have organizations offer space for a lawyer to come and talk with women once a month. This is needed specifically for women or advocates working on their behalf. You don't have the depth of knowledge as a non-profit volunteer.

There is a huge administrative gap in delivering the service. It needs to be funded. I don't know how that is going to happen. Sharon and I are going to call Yvonne and drive to Quebec. When a woman comes in [to her organization] someone talks to her and then they get together as a whole team and brainstorm options.⁴ Their stats are reliable, and they show that still 70 percent of women end up leaving the job. This is comparable to our experience.

⁴ The Groupe d'Aide et d'information sur le Harcèlement Sexuel au Travail in Montréal. Yvonne Seguin is a founder and the Director of the Centre.

CONTEXTUAL SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

“Take an empathy pill. We need to think about what it must be like to walk that walk.”

Our Context

There was a strong perception amongst respondents that we are dealing with an increasingly complex set of problems. Few respondents reported dealing with women whose only problem was woman abuse. Generally, there was a consensus that when woman abuse is an isolated problem, and women have support and are financially independent, they are more able to leave and to stay out of abusive relationships. The trend described by many, however, is one of people with a range of interrelated problems and, at best, a piecemeal response to those problems. Several respondents spoke eloquently of this;

We are supposed to be getting better at what we do. Why do we have families with more problems when we have more services? We need to look at interrelated problems and the context of community and society. We need to make sure that we don't adopt a need to find cause and effect. Research is structured this way, but lives are chaotic and complex. We need to divvy up people's problems, and we say, 'Go for substance treatment over there and woman abuse over there.' What is the message? We are giving the wrong message that we can fix all of the problems and that they are independent problems.

We are in a downward spiral of cuts and growing poverty. We have all witnessed the withdrawal of services from health care, housing and social assistance. A number of factors have contributed; Harris cuts, deinstitutionalization, changes in Child Welfare Legislation, cuts in schools. All of this has come together and, in the last few years, we have seen an explosion of problems.

Against a backdrop of poverty, homelessness and abuse, we have a response of criminalization.

The Erosion of Social Services

Respondents spoke of social service cuts as a major problem. Women and children experiencing or witnessing abuse feel these cuts in a variety of ways;

Funding cutbacks to services have produced longer waiting lists. People don't get the services they want, and if an appointment is six months away, they may not keep it.

Neighbourhood-based supports, programs for children, ESL classes, supports that are necessary to neighbourhoods disappeared overnight. Core funding for neighbourhood centres disappeared. Small programs that are neighbourhood-specific are gone or are in jeopardy.

Funding cuts to Second Stage Housing put more stress on shelters that have tried to keep these programs operating.

Respondents pointed out that cuts in the social service sector have been amplified by parallel cuts in the educational and health sectors;

There is very limited access to health care for women and children. It is difficult to get a family doctor. Women and children can access sporadic care through the Intercommunity Health Centre or walk-in clinics, but prevention is missing. There are no pap tests, no well baby test. It's possible to work around those problems, but it is a disjointed system and a disjointed response and there is an overall lack of resources.

With changes in the education system, there are higher expectations on parents to be involved, and this creates more stress for families. Some of these families are not able to cope with more stress, and this can put the education of children at risk.

Non-governmental funders have tried to step in and fill the void where possible, but they too are struggling. The concern and frustration of non-governmental funders is evident in these quotes;

United Way is often faced with requests from groups who had project funding and who are trying to keep programs going. We have dramatically increased core funding to a Community Centre to try to replace that loss.

The bowl of icing is just this big and we keep on baking cakes and the icing keeps getting thinner and thinner.

When interest rates dropped, London Community Foundation had less to give out from its endowed funds.

Poverty

Respondents spoke often of the problems posed by poverty. They are seeing an increasing marginalization of families who are living below the poverty line. There is a lack of support for these people, and cutbacks have played into that;

Economics are the biggest challenge. You can't do anything if you can't pay the bills. If women have their heat turned off and they are at the food bank and they can't get any more food, all the counselling in the world won't help. They have to hook up with another jerk to get the basics. They become very embittered. They become hopeless.

Some felt that epidemic rates of violence against women and an increasing number of child deaths have been advanced by poverty. They called attention to the fact that abuse forces women and children to live in poverty, for lifetimes, and sometimes for generations. It has the potential to block individuals' potential.

Some decried the lack of commitment to a redistribution of wealth that includes and embraces everybody;

This is fundamental societal stuff; the rich are getting richer; the poor are getting poorer; it costs more to do less.

An insightful comment clearly draws the links between poverty and violence against women;

Poverty is the ultimate power and control tool.

Ontario Works

Respondents voiced serious concerns in discussing how changes to Ontario Works have made things much worse. There were strong feelings that reductions to social assistance have really hurt people. One respondent explained how punitive measures can be;

If you go to the hospital, OW docks the accommodation portion. New and inexperienced OW workers apply that rigidly. Women lose accommodations that way.

Others further noted that;

We are making people jump through more hoops to get OW.

Single moms are trying to survive on very little and they have more limited access to childcare.

We have gotten thousands of people off OW, but where have they gone?

The additional problems for under eighteen-year-olds to get OW make it very difficult for youth.

Problems with Ontario Works are further explored in subsequent sections of this report, but it's important to highlight this issue because the impacts are serious and far reaching. Although the effects may be visible to many of us, a respondent explained the serious consequences for some women;

Women have been forced into entry level sex trade to survive.

Another respondent insightfully remarked that;

The power and control tactics women often face in trying to sustain themselves through OW mirror the power and control tactics of the abusers they have left.

Attitudes towards the Most Vulnerable

Several respondents spoke of the damaging legacy of the Harris government. They were disturbed by a “collective yawn” at the condition of the most vulnerable;

The collective consciousness has been poisoned by the previous government. We have come to believe it is okay to treat vulnerable people in degrading and humiliating ways. The attitude towards people on assistance is very negative. Conservatives have gotten more conservative, and we’ve become defensive about diversity and inclusivity.

The Tories have demonized segments of the population: women on welfare, anyone receiving assistance, cultures. Some people are automatically suspect because of what they look like. If a woman’s self esteem hasn’t been eroded enough as a result of abuse, we will try to make her less than human because of her vulnerability.

People with mental illness have suffered terribly in these circumstances, and many of them are women. The lack of social supports has resulted in many people with mental illness being jailed. 25-35 percent of the prison population suffers from mental illness, leading Mr. Justice Edward Ormston, from the Mental Health Division Court, to remark that;

Jail is the only place open to mentally ill people twenty-four hours day. Often the price of homelessness is jail⁵

Another respondent observed that;

Police have been learning the hard way that people in emotional crisis are in crisis, not criminals. There is an impact on police dealing with these cases and it can be devastating. Police know that the problem is often deeper than what we see.

Respondents echoed this frustration, saying;

We are pepper spraying, leaving naked people handcuffed to cell bars – and no one is horrified. How do we undo the damage done by the spread of these values and attitudes?

What appears as craziness is sometimes just hurt. Police are responding to emotionally distressed people, who have been broken apart by pressures of economic hardship, isolation and loneliness.

In closing facilities for people with mental illness, we have moved them from hospitals to jails. Have police officers become our new front line mental health workers? Many are asking the question: Should the crisis be handled by others, by

⁵ “*Police Contact with People with Serious Mental Illness*”; London Police Services Video

mental health workers, by peer support groups, by people without guns? The number of encounters between police and people in emotional crisis has escalated.

A respondent made a powerful statement that summarizes these concerns;

We need community. We need communities to wrap around the most vulnerable. We need to look after each other. We need to create supportive environments. We are losing our feminist views of the world. The current generation, young adolescents and young adult women, are reaping the benefits of a more equitable system, but they are not getting the call to bring those who are less resourced along. We are letting the poor get poorer, but really letting women and children get poorer. We have lost our idealism, so while some women are breaking glass ceilings, others are struggling under heavier burdens.

Devaluing the Role of Care Giving

In her examination of how First Nations communities are faring, Kim Anderson, an Aboriginal woman writer, eloquently describes how women are doubly punished for being poor and for being mothers.

We have come through several decades of a political climate built on poor bashing. Right wing governments in Canada and the U.S. have encouraged the mainstream to believe that the poor are to blame for their misery. The poor, so this reasoning goes, are too lazy to work and therefore use 'the system.' 'Welfare mothers (and their children) are seen as a burden on society; single mothers are blamed for the social and moral downfall of the modern world.

Single mothers face isolation, a lack of community and devaluation of the role of mother. Once on Ontario Works, they are told very clearly that it is not an option to want to parent their children full time. A respondent explains that;

The goal of many clients is to get back to work and have someone else provide care for children.

We haven't stopped to consider whether or not that is best for the mothers or for their children. Although most women who experience abuse continue to be good parents, women who have been abused can benefit from time and space to reinforce and deepen their relationship with their children once they escape the abuse. This is reassuring and beneficial for both mothers and children;

There is a need to provide both physical and psychological space for women to be together with their children. Once women get stabilized and have their children in their care, many of them love volunteering in their children's schools or becoming involved in other aspects of their children's lives.

These contributions can be beneficial to the entire community, as well as to the woman and her children. But currently, we have taken this option away from women without considering the short-term or the long-term consequences. It is conditions like these that led a respondent to remark that;

Women's oppression is still not recognized. The whole issue of sexism - not fully recognized; the issue of woman abuse - not fully recognized.

INCREASINGLY COMPLEX LIVES

“The women are amazing. I feel fortunate to have an opportunity to work with them. They are my heroes because of how well they deal with the challenges they face.”

When asked whether or not the lives of the people they deal with are becoming more complex, a few respondents noted that;

We have always seen the families in crisis.

Our cases have remained fairly consistent over the past decade.

Others noted that while it is true that they have always seen people dealing with big problems, this is intensifying;

We’ve always seen women with complex lives, but the societal pressures seem more intense and that is related to poverty issues and limited services. Ten years ago, we didn’t see women cut off of OW. You could always get a family doctor, but now it’s impossible. It’s more difficult for women because of these factors. We don’t have the same safety nets in place that we had.

There was a large degree of consensus among respondents that the situations they deal with are becoming more complex, and that intervention and resource needs have intensified. There was some speculation that this could be due to increased awareness of the problem of woman abuse.

Years ago, domestic abuse was a personal issue not a public concern. Police are able to lay charges, so I’m unsure if we are seeing more complicated lives or just seeing them for the first time.

For the most part, there was strong agreement that at the same time as awareness is increasing, the growing needs and the bigger and bigger crises facing abused women and their children, and sometimes the men who abuse them as well, are related to poverty and cutbacks;

In part, it is our increasing awareness of family violence and woman abuse. There is also an increasing marginalization of families who are living below the poverty line. A lack of supports, cutbacks have played into it.

Women’s lives are increasingly complex. There has been a lot more profile on the issue of woman abuse. Women are more aware of opportunities and demand for service is greater. But by the time they actually get in for service, their lives are very complex.

With some consistency, respondents noted a timeframe for the escalation of problems facing those that they serve. They also describe a lag between the implantation of the cuts and the devastating consequences;

About 98/99, the needs started to increase. Though cuts started earlier, people struggled to hold lives together and effects were only seen somewhat later.

I have seen it reported more in the last four to five years. The situation has been evolving over time, but in the last four to five years, it has been more pronounced.

As people tapped out all of their resources, their personal skills were also drained. We see so many with concurrent disorders.

In many cases, those who use our violence against women services and other supportive social services are those that cannot afford private services. Nonetheless, respondents noted that not all of the women they see are experiencing financial hardships;

There is a large university population that we serve. They are well resourced.

Many women who have resources are accessing private resources. Maybe 20 percent of women [who experience abuse] are financially stable.

It's mixed. There are some women who are just in an abusive relationship, but often they grew up in a violent home or were emotionally neglected or sexually abused. They cross all strata of socio-economic classes.

For years, those working in the field of violence against women have carefully explained that woman abuse is a problem that cuts through all socio-economic strata. These comments bear out the truth of that contention. However, this fact does not negate the increasingly complex problems faced by those who have fewer economic resources. Respondents described the people and the situations they face daily with compelling clarity;

The list of presenting and concurrent problems includes mental health, substance use, addictions, more and more medications, aggressive behaviour: for men poverty and substance use: for women poverty, but not as much substance abuse, child welfare, housing, women in conflict with the law.

I don't have one client who is just dealing with woman abuse.

There is no such thing as a simple problem in isolation and you just solve it. There is always so much going on. I see the presenting problem more as an external symptom that is just scratching the surface. We may not even get to the real problem.

Seventy to 80 percent of the women we work with have compounding problems. Mental health, depression and addictions are very common.

We see women dealing with child welfare issues and woman abuse and also with mental health, addictions, poverty, housing, inter-generational violence, physical health issues and isolation.

Yes, we are seeing people dealing with increasingly complex lives. Poverty, intergenerational abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, CAS involved. The violence is not just between the victim and perpetrator. Women and men have been neglectful and abusive, not good parents, but they are too beaten down. You can't be a good parent if you're hooked on cocaine. There is a lack of traditional good family support, a lack of extended family. Many kids are being diagnosed with ADHD and are on meds.

Every one of the clients dealing with abuse is also dealing with other problems, such as housing, poverty, mental health and addictions.

We are seeing more concurrent disorders, addictions and mental health problems.

Isolation is a problem; people are living without supports for an extended period of time.

We are seeing a lot more depression, a much busier lifestyle.

We have been discussing an increase of scripts.

There are many people with chronic medical problems, fiber mialgia, arthritis, chronic pain.

Some people just never get a break; they have difficulties on all fronts. We are seeing the problems in the children now; they are intergenerational. These people are always in crisis; the crisis is always re-invented. It's not likely to change.

Many women have low levels of education. Often they also have an esteem problem.

Victims report that they can't deal with bigger issues of relationships because they are dealing with complex and overwhelming situations.

In mental health, there is absolute consensus at all of the tables where I sit that the profile of a woman presenting with SMI is more severe, more complex, more multi-layered than we have ever seen, such that you hardly know what to begin with. Then add in that she also has an abuse history or current violence over 80 percent of the time.

Most of our clients are dealing with multiple problems.

Mental health, addictions, child welfare, poverty, housing, racism, illiteracy, status problems, dislocation, loss of identity; 100 percent of our clientele are dealing with problems in one or more areas identified above at the same time as they are dealing with woman abuse. We only see those women who stay overnight once in while. They stay for as long as they can.

We are seeing more and more women who are experiencing mental health problems and are trying to design groups to address that. Intake and assessment is quite comprehensive. An area that we pay attention to is lethality, to self and others.

We see issues of women trading sex for a place to live. Slum landlords are taking advantage of vulnerable people.

One respondent wonders about the lives of the women we do not see;

We do not see women who are just dealing with woman abuse. And we must recognize that there are many women who have not accessed the system. They are the most isolated, the most vulnerable. We don't know them and we don't know very much about their lives and the challenges they face.

A woman's chances of escaping an abusive situation and building a better life for herself and her children is severely compromised by the kinds of compounded problems described here;

Mental health is the biggest presenting problem. Much of it is depression. Whatever support they had has fallen apart. Imagine if you have no money; you have moved into shelter; there is no privacy, no sense of belonging or ownership. Perhaps you have been out of the workforce for a long time; you need retraining. You have no job and no childcare. You rely on friends and neighbours for bus fare and rides. You have children that you want to be the best possible provider for and you are faced with overwhelming challenges.

When women face the near impossibility of sustaining themselves and their children financially, when they deal with depression and/or addictions, they risk losing control over their own lives. That lack of control makes them more vulnerable to abuse. It is hard to imagine how they would access the strength or the resources to move on and build a new life. It becomes clear why women stay and why respondents are seeing evidence of intergenerational abuse.

Some stay because they have kids. Some stay because of business entanglements. I don't see a lot of people saying they are in love with their abuser. They are confused; they have a traumatic attachment. I don't really think that's why women stay.

It's too hard to get out. The emotional toll is huge. If women don't have good self-esteem, that's when they go back.

Complex problems are stressful for those trying to address them, as well as for those experiencing them. Respondents frequently reported feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the situations they face. Implicitly or explicitly, they also named the problem as being larger than any single organization and called attention to the need for a systemic response;

In the six-month update reports, all agencies are talking about having to deal with problems that are new and emerging. Everyone is dealing with new issues and they have to deal with this because 'it is your clients' lives.' Some feel ill equipped to deal with this, for example problems involving children, seniors, housing.

There is a danger in seeing woman abuse services and social services in general as a black hole of endless need. It can be an unconscious (and unethical) rationale for doing nothing. These are not problems that will go away or even remain at a consistent level if inaction and inattention is our response. The misery and suffering of women and children will increase and the ensuing societal costs will intensify with each new generation born into hopelessness;

Addiction problems are growing. I don't know stats, but often addictions have something to do with criminal activity. Child custody and poverty issues are often part of whole picture. Metal health problems are big. It is a huge problem in the criminal justice system. How do we do something that is going to solve the problems?

Dealing with problems of woman abuse, addictions and mental health in the criminal justice system is the most costly option of all. The situation demands a great deal more early intervention and prevention efforts. As a respondent explains;

From a service point of view, it is overwhelming. But from a system planning point of view, it is imperative that we think it through because the system is not meeting the real needs of these women.

LAYERS OF MARGINALIZATION AND ISOLATION

“Intersectionality is a conceptualization of the problem that attempts to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create background inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like. Moreover, intersectionality addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these axes constituting the dynamic or active aspects of empowerment.”⁶

Isolation is both an effect of violence and a risk factor for experiencing violence. When women are marginalized and isolated for any reason, their risk of victimization increases. Isolation and marginalization occur for a variety of reasons, including language and cultural barriers, living in a rural area, poverty, physical or mental health problems, age, addictions, participation in the sex trade or being in conflict with the law. These women can be victimized through interpersonal violence, racism, social exclusion and/or extreme poverty. But as a respondent observed;

There are few resources going into reaching out to the women who are most marginalized and isolated and, therefore, most vulnerable. These are women with addictions, women on the streets, women in the sex trade, women with disabilities, newcomer women, rural women, etc...

Being aware of the multiple ways in which a woman can be marginalized helps us to recognize the structures that create such inequity.

In the course of our discussions, respondents shared their insights about the particular difficulties facing various groups of women. It is essential that we listen carefully to these observations for clearly a “one size fits all” model of service provision can only reinforce the marginalization and isolation so many women are already experiencing.

Young Women

Several respondents voiced concern over a lack of services for young women;

Twelve- to sixteen-year aged girls do not have any place to go. Some agencies believe that they need parental permission to serve them. In the medical profession, anyone over twelve can give consent. We’re not sure with respect to community services. We have asked the Ministry of Community and Social Services about this.

There are lots of youth that don’t seek service that are trying to deal with difficult situations on their own and not disclosing to anyone. They will wait until the problem gets very bad.

⁶ Kimberley Crenshaw(2000, p. 8)*The Intersectionality of Race and Gender Discrimination*. Available from: <http://www.isiswomen.org/womenet/apgr-list/archive/msg00013.html>

The other area of women not serviced well is teenagers who are abused.

In the youth population, many are staying with friends. They have no permanent housing. Some use the Unemployment Help Centre or the Career Centre for messages.

A respondent who works with young females who are on the street says;

They are part of the street culture; they will not go to a shelter. This is another area that we as a community need to think about and be aware of.

Another respondent talks about a different youth culture;

I have talked to teens who are abused. It's a very different culture. The guys are extremely controlling. If they report or a guy is charged, it's not accepted culturally. They are ostracized from their community for squealing. Are we doing the best we can to reach them?

Not surprisingly, one respondent reported that this leads to;

...many situations of older people preying on young vulnerable people.

A respondent summarized what we need to do;

We need to listen to youth. We need to learn their language and their culture. We need to build some trust with this population. There is big gap in terms of working with this population.

Making the Connections: Abuse, Mental Health and Addictions

*The Kitchen Table Project*⁷, a study of women in the mental health system that was coordinated locally, tells us that;

... 80 percent of participants spoke of either childhood abuse and/or violence in current relationships. Reactions to trauma are often used as signifiers of mental illness.

A respondent describes this reality;

In women's crash beds, most women are childhood sexual abuse survivors. In mental health services, a high percentage of clients have disclosed this abuse. The women themselves are not making a connection between that trauma and their current mental health problems. The awareness is starting with service providers.

⁵ Lee Hinton, B.A., A.T., M.S.W.; *Kitchen Table Project: Evaluating the Experiences of Women within the Mental Health System Since Reform, Phase 2*. Written for Women's Health and Addiction Research Coalition. Funded by Status of Women Canada

Those working in addiction services have been making the links with abuse;

In addiction services, there was always a philosophy that you need to look at the big picture, the context of a client's life. In addictions, counsellors work with self report, not with diagnoses. There was a shift from a disease model to harm reduction and less labelling of women.

Despite a growing understanding that woman abuse is intricately linked to mental health problems and addictions in the lives of women, none of the sectors are fully prepared to deal with women whose lives are complicated by all of these factors;

Some VAW agencies rely heavily on outside expertise to deal with mental health problems. Perhaps they feel disempowered and therefore are not helping women to the full extent possible. Rotholme is a good example of the three sectors coming together. They deal with clients who have mental health and addiction issues. Zwaanong, is also a place that provides service from the three sectors combined. That is who they see. These agencies serve all three sectors and get the least funding. They get the hardest-to-deal-with women. It's the end of the line. Women are not connected to a psychiatrist or family doctors so they can't get meds, even if they want them.

Another respondent discussed the problem from another perspective;

At Women's Community House, women are presenting with more mental health issues. In a shelter setting, it's very disruptive for everyone, even if they are not predisposed to mental illness, but extremely so for women who are off their meds and have mental illness.

The thread that connects mental health problems, addictions and abuse is trauma. Everyone from the mental health sector, the addictions sector and the violence against women sector needs an understanding of trauma in order to respond helpfully to women. The education gap is mirrored by a service gap that cuts across sectors;

The gap is in long term trauma services.

Awareness of the interconnectedness of the problem will grow as we all start to collect stats from mental health and addictions services on how many service users have traumatic backgrounds. Currently the three sectors are benefiting from a dialogue. This is encouraging work that needs to be sustained.

Women with Mental Health Problems

In the previous section, respondents discussed how often the abused women they see are also dealing with mental health problems, particularly depression. Many women experience both problems at the same time. Given this reality, it's sobering to consider that vital services to prevent women from developing serious mental health problems

were cut. Currently, we actually deny service based on the degree of seriousness of the problem;

We need better services for moderately mentally ill people. You have to be seriously mental even for access to assessment.

Funding is going to the Seriously Mentally Ill. But the women we deal with, it's depression, PTSD. Some are quite situational; it's episodic, based on the threat of losing her children or a current bad relationship.

But even women who do have serious problems are not getting the help they need;

The last three years have been horrendous for mental health services. If women go to the South Street Campus Emergency Department suicidal or in need of intervention, they may even arrive in their pajamas, they will be turned around without even a quarter to call someone. Women are just walking away and seeing the London Abused Women's Centre⁸ and walking in.

Many people in this area have been patients in a psychiatric ward. There is very little support for these people. They may have a social worker who sees them once a week.

Respondents described how women who have been abused and who are dealing with mental illness face a lack of understanding and support;

With women who are seriously mentally ill, woman abuse is not addressed in a way that would be helpful. Many times they are simply dismissed because they are so hard to deal with.

We also have women coming in who are diagnosed with a mental health problem. A woman said she had been raped. It turned out that it was a historical rape. She had been to hospital many times, but she never got any follow-up.

When people have concurrent mental health [and abuse] issues, they are under-serviced, abused and neglected.

When women have experiences of mental illness and institutional abuse, often when they disclose abuse, it can't be substantiated because they are not credible. It's hard to draw out a single incident, when their whole lives have been based on abuse and violence. It's very different from isolated incidents, or a short-term abusive relationship.

⁸ L.A.W.C. has since relocated to a new address further away from the South St. Campus of the hospital

A study conducted by the Family Consultants of the London Police Service⁹ demonstrates that in the absence of appropriate support for people with mental health problems, they are criminalized. Half of the population with a mental illness in London who had contact with the police had been arrested or charged at least once. 38 percent of women with mental illness were charged in 2001 compared to 15 percent of women in the general population.

Property offenses, violent offenses and administrative charges for offenses such as breach of parole and failing to attend court all decreased amongst this population. Statistics show that people with mental illness are no more likely than the general population to commit these types of offenses. There was a dramatic increase in PON or by-law offenses. A respondent explains these are primarily related to;

...trespassing, causing a disturbance. It's about getting rid of people who have no place to go.

The number of interventions with people with mental illness increased 232 percent between 1993 and 2003. Once charged, people with mental illness are more likely to be found guilty (72 percent) than people from the general population (60 percent). They are more likely to go to prison (57 percent vs. 34 percent), less likely to get probation (31 percent vs. 44 percent) and more likely to be fined (41 percent vs. 34 percent). Acquittal rates are almost non-existent (.2 percent vs. 3 percent for the general population.)¹⁰

25 percent of people with mental illness who have contact with the police are re-involved with the police within four days. 80 percent of them are re-involved within two years.

One of the authors of the study states that this;

...under-represents what is happening to people with mental illness because it only includes those who can definitely be identified as having a mental illness. Probable and possible cases were not included.

In light of all this, a respondent explains that in closing down hospitals for the mentally ill;

We have trans-institutionalized. We have moved people from hospitals to jails.

More cost-effective and more sensitive approaches to supporting women with mental health problems have been rejected. A respondent explains;

We rely on grants completely for feminist programming, for women's programming. We were able to get the Ministry of Health to designate London

⁹ Lisa Heslop, Kathleen Hartford, Hazel Rona, Larry Stitt and Jeff Hoch for the Consortium for Applied Research and Evaluation in Mental Health. London Police Service, The University of Western Ontario, Lawson Health Research Institute. Funded in part by a grant from the Canadian Donner Foundation

¹⁰ Ibid

East as the deliverer of women's programs. Potentially dollars for women's programming should flow more easily. The Ministry of Health has said that women are a special population and this enables them to say that they are doing something for women. But we do not get one penny extra and they are forcing London East to amalgamate.

Women Who Use Substances

Earlier references to the high prevalence of addictions and substance use indicate that it is important to pay attention to this issue. Women face serious challenges when they decide to deal with their problem;

Women are fearful when they come because they are afraid they will lose children or lose access to children.

We attempt to help them get over barriers like childcare and transportation, poverty, homelessness and near homelessness and the stigma attached to being a crack mom or an alcoholic mom and the difficulty they have trusting any organization.

Women come to substance use and wanting to deal with it through many different paths, as a respondent explains;

Clients are very diverse, some have not completed grade 8, and some have a university education.

They have lost a lot because of substance use and whatever brought them to substance use.

We have older clients, well into their forties. They may have successfully raised children and run into problems or they may have lost all of their children and want just one. Pregnancy is a huge motivator for change; it's an opportune moment.

The younger the women we see here, the better, when we're trying to deal with cyclical, intergenerational problems. If they have a stable income and housing, they have a much easier time.

While a whole range of supports are needed, a respondent mentioned a specific gap;

There is a need for a women's detox or withdrawal management. If women could see a way to seek help for themselves, they would. Even women who need an increased level of treatment can't figure out what happens to their kids, their OW. They will lose their housing [if they go into detox.]

Sex Trade Workers

Few respondents discussed having any contact with women in the sex trade. Those who did noted that it can be difficult to offer service because;

Escorts and dancers are hard to follow and hard to track.

Another respondent remarked that;

Women working in the sex trade have very likely been involved in violent situations and likely are now.

There is some indication that services may be beginning to reach out to sex trade workers, as one respondent reported;

Women and men who work in the sex trade are calling the crisis line. More agencies are calling around making appropriate referrals when they are sexually assaulted. Men in the sex trade who are sexually assaulted also need services.

Women in Conflict with the Law

One respondent linked women's conflict with the law to their experiences of abuse;

Women who have been abused tend to find themselves in abusive relationships. It seems to be a cycle. Their offenses are related to the instability of their relationships. Often they are related to survival, stealing food or clothing. These women tend not to have good self-esteem. They don't have the confidence to initiate and sustain long-term employment. They fall back on social services which are clearly inadequate.

Another respondent also linked women in conflict with the law to poverty;

Poverty and crime are linked. We don't really have training on the links between poverty and crime. We have thrown people into deeper poverty and sometimes crime. Desperation pushes people into crime.

A respondent noted that the period of incarceration is potentially a time when we could reach out to women and work with them, but that this does not happen;

We should have some in-house education/support for women's issues while they are incarcerated. It feels like a big loss in a woman's life, a missed opportunity. There's a better chance she will be clean and that she will attend sessions than once she is on the outside again.

Respondents also talked of cases where woman who had been abused were countercharged and how that could send them into a downward spiral, where they risked losing their children, their income and their home.

Women with Disabilities

Some respondents discussed some of the specific vulnerabilities of women with disabilities;

Some women with disabilities fear leaving abusive relationships. Self-confidence and self-esteem are problems. They have no appropriate clothing and no money for childcare.

Money is always an issue. It's hard to be independent without a good income.

We still see a lot of vulnerability in clients with developmental disabilities. They may not be able to identify abuse in relationships.

I have seen situations where a woman with a disability with kids leaves a violent situation, but the kids are removed from a loving parent because we don't have the capacity to support her.

Respondents identified many challenges and barriers that are specific to women with disabilities who are seeking services;

Very few physicians' offices or community agencies are accessible. Shelters have spent money on design consultants, but have ended up without good accessibility. I hear the same stories from women across the province.

The philosophy in shelters is that you have to look after your own children, but they need extra supports. They can't do the parenting alone. Often there is not dialogue around it, and even if there is flexibility, the current messaging is still a barrier. It reinforces the idea that you can't be a real parent if you can't physically care for your child.

The system does not support women with disabilities by recognizing that they are dependent upon their partners for getting out. They have to book para-transit ahead of time. She can't do an escape plan based on when it's safest for her because she has this difficulty in transportation.

Very few services have TTY lines. Bell relay is a cumbersome process. TTY doesn't take a lot of training. Buildings are not designed well for people with low vision. These things pose subtle but significant barriers for anyone with a disability to get out of an abusive relationship.

Many women with disabilities are on waiting lists for London Housing.

A respondent remarked on the low rates at which abuse is reported by women with disabilities. She works with people with disabilities and noted that;

Two out of fifty or sixty women in the program right now have disclosed abuse. There are probably more than that, but they have not identified as such.

Another respondent offered some insight into why reporting rates are low;

It's a huge risk and difficult to get acknowledged that care providers are often abusive. They are so intimate in the care they provide, it's difficult to maintain personal boundaries and they are isolated.

The other dynamic that is hard to discuss is men with disabilities who are abused. Shame is a big barrier.

And sometimes when people with disabilities do disclose, they continue to face barriers;

Because of the lack of a sexual identity for people who use alternative learning devices, the vocabulary is not there to describe bodies, abuse or sexuality. I've worked with some very good police officers and Crown Attorneys, but training is not there on how to use devices.

The frustration of a respondent who works with women with disabilities comes through here;

We have a huge double standard when it comes to women with disabilities. I wish that we were more adamant about not tolerating woman abuse, more proactive.

One way to ensure that the voices of women with disabilities are heard is to ensure that they are included amongst those who plan, deliver and evaluate services.

Homeless Women

Many women who are homeless also have mental health problems and/or substance abuse problems. Some of them are involved in exchanging sex for food, shelter and perhaps drugs. We can surmise from the research that the vast majority of these women are dealing with past and/or current abuse experiences. Yet most of our services are not able to deal with the complex issues that these women present. Shelters for battered women were not set up to be homeless shelters. As women face increasingly complex problems and as resources are stretched ever more thinly, some homeless women are ending up in shelters. This has raised concern for a respondent;

Shelters are also accommodating more homeless women. I'm not sure whether they should be lumped into the pool of women who have violent partners. Homeless women's needs are different from a woman who is leaving a relationship and is going to move on.

The question implicit in this concern is; how are we going to provide appropriate services for homeless women?

Senior Women

Respondents also said very little about senior women. One offered these observations;

There are a lot of concerns with senior women. They experience a lot of abuse, a lot of isolation. It's another group without a voice. They are often very dependent upon the perpetrators.

Our community could benefit from more dialogue and discussion about the needs of senior women experiencing abuse.

Newcomer Senior Women

Newcomer senior women face even more barriers and challenges as a respondent pointed out;

I saw elderly women who are newcomers being neglected by their children who sponsored them to come here. Newcomers face all the same problems as Canadian seniors, but they have literacy barriers as well. There was nothing for them except ESL classes, but they can only attend until they get their citizenship. This is the only time that they communicate with others. Once they were kicked out, they would come while classes were on and wait outside for breaks and talk to others.

First Nations Women

The First Nations women who participated in this study readily acknowledged that violence against women is a serious problem for them;

We have an epidemic in our communities. We have a high number of individuals who risk losing everything. At that point it's hopeless and bleak. We need to join with the community to say that violence against women needs to stop and we need to stop the stigma of going for help. How do we say we all have a part in this? We have to engage the community as opposed to coming in and trying to and fix everything.

These respondents situated violence against women in the broader context of colonization, a process that has had a devastating impact on First Nations peoples;

In the educational system people had a horrific time. Often the first time that aboriginal people experienced violence was in the residential schools. Parents would not force kids to go through abuse. They didn't push attendance. Our attitude towards schools and authority figures is rooted in history and unresolved grief and trauma. It's one thing for this to happen, but people need resolution, or at least to be heard. The Royal Commission was an attempt to have our voices heard, but no one was listening. There is still no resolution. There is just a pitiful attempt to reform the Indian Act, but it doesn't come from the people and it won't be respected.

I think our own people don't even get how detrimental the residential schools were, so they kind of did their job. I've been doing wills and some of them are residential school survivors and they want their ashes to go back there. We think we know what went on in those schools. We know nothing. They are really quick to anger. You can just see it come over them. It kind of gets scary. I always just head for the door when he gets that look. Of course me and my family were part of that. We got scooped in the 60s scoop. We got scooped by the CAS. And it just goes on and on and on.

Author and editor Kim Anderson further explains the link between residential schools and CAS involvement in the lives of First Nations people;¹¹

By the 1940s, half the Indian student population was enrolled in the seventy-six residential schools across the country, and some communities had *all* of their children forcibly removed at once. Many were away for their entire childhood and never came back. Some died. And many of the children that did come back home had lost their ability to communicate with their own people.

The child welfare system followed on the heels of the residential school system, with a staggering number of Aboriginal children being removed from their homes in the infamous 'sixties scoop.' Authors Ernie Crey and Suzanne Fournier have called child welfare during this period the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' stating, 'Only 1 percent of all children in care were Native in 1959, but by the end of the 1960s, 30 to 40 percent of all legal wards were Aboriginal children, even though they formed less than 4 percent of the national population.'

First Nations cultures are land-based cultures. First Nations people talk both about their connections to the environment and how those connections have been damaged;

Until 1965, aboriginal people ate off the land. Now we are looking at the cumulative impact of spraying of pollutants. In some cases, women were pregnant; children were barefoot, watching the spraying as it was going on. This is less than one hundred kilometres from London.

In 1965, we were deemed eligible for social services. Before that we survived on rations from Indian Affairs. They gave us spam. Our parents fed us wildlife and garden produce.

The environment has affected behaviour of animals, loons trying to land on land, not water, humans have been exposed to the same pollutants; same as happens to animals happens to humans.

On reserve, there is a high incidence of diabetes, glaucoma, alcoholism.

¹¹ Sumach Press, 2003. *Strong Women Stories; Native Vision and Community Survival*. Eds. Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence

Not surprisingly, mental health problems, physical health problems and social problems abound in First Nations communities;

Many people are dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress.

First Nations people are over represented in jails, in suicide statistics, in depression. Many are diagnosed with ADD. Their symptoms are misdiagnosed. We have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome babies born with complications in the brain.

There are a lot of First Nations women with addictions and mental health problems, and not even diagnosed right, and who's going to help them? A lot of times First Nations women are just shuffled from here to there.

Many native women are in jail because of counter-charging. Women are often charged.

Poverty, childcare needs must be addressed.

A lack of safety for women on reserves was clearly identified as a problem;

In First Nations communities, there is no coordination. Each community deals with woman abuse in a different way. Walpole Island has a shelter and a police service. Walpole Island was very brave to set up a shelter. The response will be different from Moravia Town, where there is not much more than child welfare programs. The City of Sarnia is on the Sarnia reserve. Quite a few women access the Sarnia shelter. Oneida has a family healing lodge; if there was an emergency, there's a place to go. In Chippewa on the Thames, there is no place to go. Women end up in a shelter in the city.

Respondents see the solutions to woman abuse as being dependent upon the resolution of the range of social and health problems that racism and colonization has caused in First Nations communities. And they clearly see real solutions as emerging from their own traditional cultural practices;

Our elders keep telling us we have to make sure Canada doesn't make us invisible. When Canada respects us, that's all we want. I think that's happening now, with things like the Dudley George inquiry. I never thought I'd see that in my lifetime. After all this time, they still don't know who we are, or pretend they don't know who we are. But how do we educate them in such a way that they are not stealing our sacred stuff? I mean our songs and ceremonies; stuff that they had at one time, but they lost it.

Traditional healers need to be supported. There are vast distances for traditional healers to travel between communities.

Men won't come if we say we are having a workshop for men who abuse; we call the workshop 'Keeping the Fire.' In the teachings of keeping the fire are the teachings of how to care for seeds, babies, and women. It reminds people of their roles and responsibilities.

We have unresolved grief and trauma and then layers of more trauma. Traditional healers do condolences. They speak to the pain and grief and allow people to let it go. This is what they are doing with Rekindling the Fire. There is a way and means of resolving the grief. We must use traditional healing.

Racialized Women

Although some respondents spoke at length about newcomer women, little was said about racialized women who are not newcomers. A few comments give us a glimpse into some of the issues that may be at play here, but fall far short of providing a comprehensive picture;

Diverse groups, who have been here for a while, gradually adopt the values of their new society.

Women view this agency as being white. Most clients are white English speaking women. We have a couple of black clients. One of big issues for women is that they have bi-racial children, and they have a lot of cultural issues. It's a real struggle for them about what is their children's culture.

It makes a difference when you have non-white staff, but it also engenders clients' racism.

Newcomer Women

Respondents spoke eloquently about the challenges of abused women who are new to Canada and about the barriers that they confront, both from their own communities and from our services;

Many of them are reluctant to access services that are specifically identified as 'woman abuse services' because this would conflict with cultural values and norms that emphasize a deep loyalty to family and community and that promote help-seeking from within the family or from religious leaders in the community. We know that it is important to build trust with these women, to approach them gently, to meet them where they are and to engage them in activities that are not intimidating or perceived as challenging to their cultural values.

It is really hard to access any service if you don't speak the language, particularly if you are in a situation where you need help, but you don't want to reveal that need.

Lately, we are seeing more and more women refugees and their children, particularly from eastern Africa. That's become a challenge because support for

these women traditionally comes from matriarchs from their own countries. They come here without any of these supports. They come with men who abandon them, but they are the daughters of matriarchs. In Canada, they are learning English as a second language, trying to provide for families on OW and dealing with abuse issues. Sometimes they have trouble accessing interpreters that can help them tell their story. Women are finding support amongst each other.

The biggest gap is still our awareness and ability to connect with the multicultural community. Sometimes it is not just information that's lacking; it is a cultural environment that regards woman abuse as a family matter. These are women who will not report. Besides immediate emergency services, there are not supportive services. We only have all or nothing options; either stay or pack up and move and take the children. Women are not always ready for that. Some groups, older women for example, are not ready to talk about it.

It would be nice to see more opportunities for the empowerment of women. We need to look at giving them some control and some opportunities to attend ESL classes. A few years ago, we had ESL classes in homes. Literacy is another problem. People are not able to fill out OW or other forms. They need to be able to access in-home resources. These are women who have no money for transportation, no childcare and can't read the forms; people who can't get on the bus because they can't read the bus signs. We make life very difficult for people who are already traumatized.

There are new immigrant women who are not aware of resources due to language barriers. The men learn English, but the women are in the house.

We try to move women in the attachment program to understand that trauma causes disordered attachment. The trauma of migration is compounded by the trauma of relationships.

There is a lot of fear of CAS amongst newcomers. They don't want to use counselling services because we are perceived as being attached to the government and they think there will be CAS involvement.

With the new legislation, they fear witnessing will be reported to CAS and they are fearful of going to family counselling and reporting this.

CAS only has a negative reputation in Bullee and with new immigrants. Women are not interested in knowing about helpful programs with CAS.

Canadian laws for child protection and women's rights are very different here than a lot of other places. A lot of immigrants are not aware of these laws and don't know that they don't need to live with abuse. They hear a lot about CAS, but not so much about protection for women.

Most women would not label their situations as woman abuse. When there has been a separation, they are more open to asking for and receiving services. Women have many different kinds of needs; immigration processes, OW demands, childcare demands; it doesn't leave them time or space for taking care of themselves. A lack of time and space closes the door even if opportunities are there.

New immigrants want contact with members of their own community. When people are in big trouble, they are going to be receiving help 'the Canadian way.' They are more interested in learning to cope with what they are not willing to adapt to. They want to maintain their own beliefs and practices around child rearing.

Authority figures can be very intimidating. She might have come from a country where that becomes a life threatening situation.

Even LUSO can be perceived as a government agency because they receive government funding.

Being able to differentiate between a service provider and a spy is sometimes a challenge. There is a very thorough investigation going on while people are waiting for their immigration papers.

As immigrants, they are already on their own as a family. The isolation will increase if they report. A woman's choice is not just about leaving an abuser; it is about leaving a community and going into a larger community that doesn't have good settlement and immigrant resources, agencies and services.

Services are often very white and mainstream. They are not meeting the need of particular cultures. Supports need to be geared to working with that culture.

Language is a significant barrier for women in the Muslim community, like any other immigrant group. Language is not only linguistic; it is also the conceptualization of the issue. Little or no language makes it difficult to seek and access woman abuse services. It's not only the need to get someone to interpret and explain. What are the services? What are they providing and where are they?

It's not easy to understand how to make an abused women feel comfortable asking for help from anti-violence agencies. Most of them feel that they are being abused, but they don't want to identify themselves with a feminist definition of an abused woman. They may be verbally and even physically abused, but they would not think this is a reason to leave the relationship or to ask for help.

Language is a key element when we talk about what prevents abused women from diverse communities accessing services. The way people in the Muslim community perceive the services will affect the perceptions of women, and this

plays a negative role in them accessing services. Even when they know they are being abused and know they need help, they are doing something that the Muslim community would question them for.

The attitude of Muslim people or people with Middle Eastern backgrounds towards professional help and social services is very negative. Traditionally, people from these cultures try to deal with family problems within the family, extended family or tribe. Most times this internal intervention has a religious character. They prefer to go to the imam or a priest to ask for advice and help. They are comfortable with this kind of internal intervention for two reasons: First, if an abused woman asks for help from the extended family, this will not cause her problems within the family and within the community. It will not empower the spouse against her because asking for this help is acceptable. To go to his father, her father or a religious leader is okay. The idea is that it's not necessary to bring these issues outside of the extended family or the tribe. In this case a woman can feel very comfortable explaining her experience of abuse with her spouse, without hesitation, like women in Canadian families. They have negative attitudes towards professional help because there is another mindset about how to deal with internal problems of family. Secondly, traditionally religious leaders deal with social problems. They would consider these problems as part of spiritual healing. They don't even officially recognize work like psychology and social work as legitimate. They are just starting to recognize these professionals. For these and other reasons, people try not to bring problems related to family violence to the outsider.

There is another point here that has to do with power struggles in the broader social context. In my home country, there are two tendencies, the conservatives that try to keep things as they were and another movement that tries to bring about social change. Right now, those in charge are conservatives. They try to keep woman abuse problems under the control of religious leaders, tribal leaders and extended families. If they accept that this is not their job, they will have less power and the moderates and reformers will have more power. This is why still many people think you should deal with problems in the family and, if necessary, go to a religious leader.

This prevents women from accessing services. For example, the hotline; this is not in their cultural background; nor is going to a social worker or a social service. And of course it is more complicated when it's woman abuse. To go to woman abuse services is even more outside of cultural norms than going to general social services. Woman abuse services are associated with the idea that they are about breaking down families.

The priority is protecting abused woman vs. keeping the family together. If you put the issue in this way, to keep the family together or to protect an abused woman; many women would say we would rather keep the family together and we would sacrifice our lives in order to keep our family together. The family

comes first as a unit and the rights of the individual in the family are secondary. This is a key point, because it is a process to learn about individual rights. People have had difficulty separating the abstract rights of family, community and religion from individual rights. Many women are suffering abuse, but they think they are doing the right thing. They are supposed to sacrifice for the family and the community.

Women know they are suffering from different forms of abuse, but they don't think they need to resolve this problem by getting support from outside of the family. I would think that an abused woman in the Muslim community would weigh the risks and benefits of accessing woman abuse services. The benefits would be good for her, but the cost would be to the family. She has been sacrificing her whole life for her kids and her family. She is respected for this sacrifice. She is a good wife and a good mother. She internalizes this as a compensation for her suffering. So now, if she has been married for some time and has been suffering, she would say, 'No, I am comfortable staying in this abusive relationship,' because she knows this reality, but she also knows the payoff. God will compensate us on the Day of Judgment. I am a good mother; I will stay for my kids and keep a good family image.

The choice for her is black and white. If she goes to a woman abuse service, she will lose all that she has sacrificed for. Her kids will be subjected to an unknown future; her family will be damaged and she will be responsible. Some of them have been persuaded to go to WCH, but they couldn't continue using services. Psychologically, put yourself in the shoes of these women; they are 100 percent dependent on their husbands. Most are coming through arranged marriages. That means there is some kind of agreement between both families. A woman doesn't have a lot to say about her destiny. She came with certain expectations. She wants to be a good mother; she wants to have advantages for her kids and for her family. In her mind, she wants to make sure that she will not be a bad wife. She is supposed to make sure that she provides a good environment for her husband to go out and work and make the economic life of family better. A lot of her self-esteem comes from fulfilling this role in the family.

Like in any other society or community that emigrates to Canada, men are dominant. That would be reflected in different areas; economic, social, religious and any other aspects of life. When they come from their country to Canada, the woman really don't see themselves as doing something different. They see themselves as continuing in their previous roles. Now there are many options for them; going to school, learning English, driving cars, getting a job. Some take advantage of these options. But taking advantage of these options may bring them problems. Their husbands may feel challenged. Some women may appear liberal, from their appearances, their dress and actions. But they may be trying to emphasize that they are dependent on their husband. And others may appear conservative, but be very liberal, assertive and independent.

In 90 percent of the cases I dealt with, I would see classic abuse elements that they have gone through, and they are very open to tell you about these abusive behaviours and how that affects their lives and put their lives in jeopardy. But when it comes to the point of offering support, you see a very negative response.

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the challenges facing women from the diverse communities of London and Middlesex County, but rather a report of what those on the front lines are observing. Several respondents commented on the challenges in diversifying staff to better reflect the changing demographics of our community. This report does include the voices of racially and ethnically diverse women and men, but there are many more that we need to connect with and learn from. Their insights are tremendously important to us and will continue to be as we plan to meet the emerging challenges of our community.

The challenge of ensuring that the voices of women who are marginalized for other reasons discussed above remains with us as well. And some intersections have not been explored at all because respondents did not discuss them. As a result, there is no mention of lesbian women or Francophone women. This report delves into the situation of rural women in a subsequent section. The impact of poverty is explored in some depth in the two preceding sections. Whether or not women who live on the margins of our society will have a voice in how services are organized and delivered is largely dependent upon the opportunities we offer for consultation, feedback and inclusion. Some of these issues will be discussed in the section on professionalization.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: WORKING ACROSS SECTORS

“There is a tension. We still do hold moms responsible. Not for the violence, but for the response to it. Ideally, we would like to hold men responsible for violence, but it’s difficult, given all of the resources available, to hold men accountable. We have to work with the person who has the children and that’s the mom, and we have to hold her accountable for making safe choices for her children.”

Separation of Issues of Child Abuse and Woman Abuse

The fact that children’s wellbeing is dependent upon the wellbeing of their parents and, in most cases, upon that of their mothers, is a simple truth that we can all too easily lose sight of in our institutional responses to woman abuse. Respondents spoke to this concern;

There is a real separation of the issues of child abuse and women abuse. We still need a lot of training and awareness on how to establish safety for mom so that we can talk to her. Within standards and regulations, we have to see how to minimize risk factors for women. We are too focused on child abuse.

The lack of understanding that the safety of mothers and their children are inextricably connected has been problematic in research and in practice.

A respondent articulated how research has contributed to the artificial separation of the interests of women and their children;

Very few authors cross domains of woman abuse and child abuse. Woman abuse causes a correlation of bad outcomes for children, but not if controlled for child abuse. When you control for substance abuse, poverty and child abuse, witnessing fades into the background. You can’t say that witnessing violence is the problem; you must look at the whole situation. Violence against mothers does not explain more than a couple of points of variance in how children turn out unless it is seen in context of other factors. You can’t study kids for effects of witnessing unless that is the only problem they are experiencing.

There is a problem with reading statistics. Significance means ‘not zero.’ Poor quality research leads to oversimplifying issues. Research reflects aggregate results, but interventions are for individuals. We can misrepresent the situation of individuals by relying on research conclusions.

New Legislation

Many respondents expressed concern that new legislation focusing on the potential harm of children witnessing abuse reinforces a separation between the interests of abused women and their children;

Keeping children safe is the intent of the new legislation, but there is a disconnect between the safety of the mother and the safety of the child. A mother goes to a shelter and she risks losing her child.

When we prioritize the safety of one over the other, we may miss the link and lose the safety of one.

The legislation that involves CAS when women go into shelter penalizes kids and moms looking for help. It's not helpful. Things are getting worse. We see where coming into shelter makes women's lives more complicated. Now they have to deal with child welfare issues too.

In fact, the new legislation does not specifically address children witnessing violence. It lowers the threshold for assessing children as being at risk of physical harm and emotional harm. Nonetheless, it is being used in cases where children are witnessing abuse. Some of the difficulties seem to have arisen out of how the legislation is being interpreted;

The legislation says children exposed to partner abuse may be in need of protection, but it is being interpreted that they are in need of protection.

There is a section of the act that says that you cannot open a file for woman abuse alone without evidence that the child is experiencing a mental health problem. This is not always what is happening.

Some traced the problems back to a fragmented approach to problem solving and a lack of consultation;

You can't start changing legislation without realizing the impact it will have on women.

We should have started working with women and community agencies first to develop appropriate responses. We would have seen different outcomes.

Some respondents were ambivalent about the legislation;

I'm unsure if CAS changes have made a positive or negative impact. The imperative to report a woman when partner abuse is occurring impedes our ability to build an alliance with her and to do more long-term work.

Others were clear that they believe women and children are being negatively impacted, whether by the legislation or the way it is being interpreted;

Are we going back to say that a woman is a danger to her child because she is a single parent?

Women who can't afford lawyers are sometimes losing their children.
Children who grow up in care do not tend to do well.

For a supervision order, you need a court order that a child is in need of protection from you. Often they are being imposed because a bad dad is the problem and mom is being held responsible.

CAS may have a role where the man is still in the home, but when the abuser has left, leave her alone.

CAS is more a watchdog than a helper. Many cases are going to court now because women are under supervision orders of the CAS, and women have cooperated and done everything that has been asked.

When we do move towards ending violence against women, the unintended consequences can catch us off guard.

Not all respondents felt the same way about how the new legislation is affecting CAS involvement in woman abuse cases;

I haven't run into any problematic situations re: CAS legislation. A supervision order is not a bad thing. As long as the partner is not on the scene, you will keep the children. I've advised women not to fight this, and later had them comment that they [CAS] were helpful. CAS can be your friend; they can be the barrier between a woman and the abuser. Once they are on the scene, they will not let the abuser near the kid. Sometimes workers are wonderful; sometimes they are awful.

One respondent describes a situation that demonstrates abused women can be good parents. This situation shows how difficult it is to reduce a complex problem like children witnessing abuse to rigid formulas of intervention;

There was a mother who wouldn't access supports through the shelter. She went to Healthy Babies and accessed the crisis line through the program. Her husband knew the times of group and would pick her up. For a long time, she called very frequently to the line for healthy babies. She was a very competent mom, but in this abusive situation. A home visit wasn't comfortable for her. With the birth of her baby, we came into the home, but he was in and out and she was always on guard. We talked to her about risks and where to get services. She had a plan of what she needed to do. She had skills to carry out the plan. She knew and understood what was happening. For her, it was a sense of timing.

The Increasing Number of Children in CAS Care

The dramatic increase in the number of children going into CAS care in our community has received a lot of attention recently. A major research study shows that woman abuse,

poverty, maternal depression, impaired parenting capacity and intergenerational CAS involvement are major contributing factors to this problem;¹²

Results identified woman abuse, poverty, mental health issues and poor parenting skills as contributing factors to the increase in referrals and admissions to care. Unless we address these factors, we can anticipate that the demand for protection services will continue to increase and the number of children in CAS care will continue to escalate.

Those findings resonate with what respondents express in this report. But on the ground, there is tension and concern about how resources are allocated;

CAS's job should be to broker, but their demand keeps going up and that funnels resources away from other agencies.

A respondent challenged these societal problems as the sole reason more children are being taken into the care of CAS;

CAS is creating its own workload by changing who gets in. When you see changes, you have to look at decision making as a possible reason for those changes. We are looking at changes in decision making, not changes in people. The risk model and fear of liability are significant changes.

While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about why more children are going into care, it is clear that a complex and interconnected set of factors are at play. Such a multifaceted problem requires careful consideration and the input of a wide range of expertise.

Risk Assessment

The Eligibility Spectrum, a relatively recent innovation, is a decision making tool used by CAS workers that outlines how to assess for risk much more clearly than was previously the case. Some respondents questioned whose interests are served by a focus on risk assessment;

When CAS is sued, they have to say they have done due diligence. Risk assessments were created to address CAS liability.

Others were overtly critical of the risk assessment model;

¹² Alan W. Leschied, Ph.D., C.Psych, Paul C. Whitehead, Ph.D., Dermot Hurley, MSW, Debbie Chiodo, MA. *Protecting Children is Everybody's Business. Investigating the Increasing Demand for Service at the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex*, The University of Western Ontario, Canada, October 2003

We are using a paradigm that we inherited from the 19th Century. When someone falls below a certain line, CAS will intervene. The bar for getting in is quite low. The bar for getting out is to be perfect.

The risk assessment model does not look at the strengths of a mother, and this raised concerns for some respondents;

The risk assessment model is a tool. We have forgotten how to be social workers and how to work with people. Look at the parenting; watch them. Don't make predictions based on risk assessment. There is a capacity to hurt, to re-victimize single, poor mothers using risk assessment. For example, a woman reports an assault; they come, they see a single mother living in London Housing, a single mom with two different fathers for her children. They see CAS written all over her. They don't consider that she is a good parent, attending school, planning for her children.

We need to look at women's attitude towards their children. We need to consider their capacity for empathy, their degree of social isolation and their ability to get resources. We impose high behavioural expectations on people who are hungry and living in extremely demanding circumstances without support.

You are using aggregate data to predict individual behaviour. It's very likely to be inaccurate. Risk assessment was not intended to be predictive; it was intended to be descriptive. People with too little knowledge are using it. As a service provider, don't make the mistakes of research and oversimplify.

A respondent made the important point that;

The intent of tools is to fill in information gaps, but it's all about attitudes.

Respondents were concerned that risk assessment can be misused, especially by inexperienced workers;

New workers are still a problem. Risk assessments may be based on allegations that prove to be false.

CAS workers are judging. Workers are so young and so inexperienced; they bring a lot of stereotypes.

There is the capacity to use knowledge of woman abuse as a weapon against women. Don't use the idea that you are being helpful to justify very intrusive interventions in women's lives. Challenge the risk assessment paradigm.

Efforts to Promote CAS-VAW Collaboration

The decision to move from a risk assessment model to a strengths-based model is primarily a provincial one, not a local one. Nonetheless, a critical step towards this shift

is building a good collaborative working relationship between the child protection sector and the violence against women sector. The Ministry of Community and Social Services funded joint training for the two sectors for several years. However, as a respondent notes;

The CAS-VAW training was not sustained. CAS workers have a high turnover, and they don't understand that a woman staying in a relationship can be safer than her deciding to leave.

Despite the lack of provincial commitment to this important initiative, the London-Middlesex CAS is consigning internal resources to continue delivering this training. This community has also worked together on developing a protocol to respond the cases of children witnessing woman abuse;

We worked in London to develop a community protocol between CAS and other community agencies to guide us in this matter, but the government has decided to develop their own.

The protocol was an opportunity to anticipate problems and address them in a proactive manner;

The problem is that if women feel that CAS might become involved, they will not reach out for help. The community protocol took that into account.

Although local agencies had to use a government template as the basis of the local protocol, it has been expanded and enhanced with the work that has been done locally. And the work that went into developing the protocol has strengthened relationships. Comments from respondents reflect the importance of that relationship building;

We have a great relationship with CAS and helped to develop the protocol. We can work well with CAS to resolve issues.

From an agency perspective, we have seen a positive outcome in our relationship with CAS. We can sit down with mutual clients, BUT many times, because service is so difficult to access, she is running out of time by the time that happens.

The concern that lack of service can jeopardize an abused woman's ability to keep her children in her care was reiterated;

But many times a woman will call for an appointment, but she can't get one and CAS may take children.

Collaboration between child protection workers and those that work with abused women is critically important. This community has recognized that and has taken positive steps towards building and sustaining relationships. This can go a long ways towards helping

abused women to care for and keep their children, but it cannot make up for the lack of services when they are needed, whether for the children or the mother.

Community Group Treatment Program

In contrast to the ambivalence and outright criticism the new legislation intended to deal with child witnesses of woman abuse has garnered from the VAW sector, the Community Group Treatment program is widely accepted and highly regarded. This model of intervention provides concurrent groups for children who have witnessed abuse and their mothers.

The goal is to begin the healing process by breaking isolation. They are psycho-educational groups that focus on understanding and speaking out. The moms' group is based on the kids' program. It's about how moms can support their kids as they move through group.

This approach allows CAS and VAW workers to work closely together and to learn from each other. They pool resources and both deepen their understanding of woman abuse and child abuse. Whereas the new legislation has sometimes brought about tension and a sense that the sectors are sometimes working at cross-purposes, this program has often served to build stronger relationships between the sectors;

The groups also help moms to identify their own needs and where they can go to get support. We connect them to the transitional support program and other supports in the community. The model is very structured because we need to keep the process contained. Part of the training is talking to facilitators and coordinators about this piece. It's not about meeting all needs. The biggest goal is to reduce isolation for women and help them to make links in the community.

The real challenge in the situation is for policy makers. We must find ways to address the roots of the interrelated problems we are seeing; children going into CAS care, woman abuse, poverty, mental health problems and intergenerational involvement with CAS. We also need to consider what impact racism and other forms of discrimination may be having in individual situations. This means investing more in prevention and early intervention efforts. The Community Group Treatment program is an example of programming that works across sectors, that provides a supportive, not a punitive, intervention and that builds on the strengths of abused women.

While many respondents expressed their appreciation for this program, others did point out its limitations. It is not able to adequately address the needs of severely traumatized children who require individual attention. Because all of the available funding to assist child witnesses was poured into a single initiative, there are no resources to assist those children. This is yet another example of how we cannot design, "one size fits all" programs and expect them to adequately and effectively respond to the needs of an entire community.

**USING THE LAW TO HOLD ABUSERS ACCOUNTABLE AND
SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**
“Twenty plus years of training and experience has helped the London police to get it.”

A System Overview

Reforms to improve a criminal justice response to intimate partner abuse have included a number of components: development and implementation of pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies; training programs for criminal justice professionals; support and advocacy for victims; court-mandated programs for batterers; and public education initiatives aimed at conveying the message that family violence is unacceptable. Before going to our local context, I think it is useful to briefly review the *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation*, prepared for the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice. The full report is available at:

<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/reports/spousal.html>

In September 2000, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) Ministers responsible for Justice directed the establishment of an ad hoc FPT working group to review the implementation and status of the mandatory or pro-charging and prosecutorial policies related to intimate partner abuse, as well as several proposed legislative reforms. The Ad Hoc FPT Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation was established in November 2000 and is co-chaired by the Department of Justice Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Justice. The Working Group submitted its first report to FPT Ministers at their September 11, 2001 meeting.

This report recognizes London as a pioneer in the development of more effective criminal justice responses. It is important to note, however, that initiatives developed in London did not extend to the rural areas of Middlesex County.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a growing awareness of and interest in the criminal justice system’s response to intimate partner assault cases, brought about in large part by the efforts of women’s groups and grass roots movements. This, in turn, led to the development and piloting of some new approaches. For example, London, Ontario became a leader in the development and provision of services to battered women with the establishment of the London Coordinating Committee on Family Violence in 1980. The committee’s 1981 report included a recommendation that police be directed to lay charges in all cases of wife assault. As a result, in May 1981, the London Police Department became the first Canadian police agency to implement a charging policy for intimate partner assault.

In May 1982, the House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs tabled its report, *Report on Violence in the Family—Wife Battering*. In it, the committee noted that police training (at that time) generally instructed against the arrest of a batterer unless he was actually found hitting the victim or unless the victim had suffered injuries that were “severe enough to require a certain number of stitches.” On

July 8, 1982, the House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion that “Parliament encourage all Canadian police services to establish a practice of having the police regularly lay charges in instances of wife beating, as they are inclined to do with any other case of common assault.” It should be noted, however, that this motion was initially greeted with “laughter and jeers.” On July 15, 1982, the Solicitor General of Canada wrote a letter to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police requesting their support and cooperation in addressing intimate partner abuse and strongly encouraged them to lay charges in wife assault cases.

Similar measures were undertaken by some provincial Attorneys General over the course of 1982-83. In 1983, the Federal Provincial Task Force on Justice for Victims of Crime recommended the development of written guidelines directing that wife assault be treated as a criminal offence and that the decision to charge or prosecute this offence be made independently of the victim’s wishes.

By 1986, the Attorneys General and Solicitors General of all jurisdictions had issued directives or guidelines to police and Crown Attorneys with respect to intimate partner abuse cases. Although the form and content of these directives varied considerably, they shared essentially the same objective—namely, to ensure that intimate partner assaults were treated as a criminal matter. Police policies generally required them to lay charges where there were reasonable and probable grounds to believe that an assault had taken place. Crown policies generally required the prosecution of intimate partner assault cases where there was sufficient evidence to support the prosecution, regardless of the victim’s wishes.

Charging Policy

The objectives of the new charging policy were:

- to remove responsibility (and blame) for the decision to lay charges from the victim;
- to increase the number of charges laid in reported intimate partner abuse cases;
- to increase the reporting of incidents of intimate partner abuse; and
- to reduce re-offending.

The pro-charging policy has succeeded in increasing the number of incidents reported to police and the number of charges laid in intimate partner abuse cases, and has reduced risk of harm through re-offending.

Increased Reporting

Although the majority of intimate partner violence victims do not report to police, GSS data from 1999 indicated that 37 percent of female victims and 15 percent of male victims who reported experiencing abuse also reported incidents to the police. The different reporting rates may be due, in part, to the less serious nature of violence experienced by male victims.

Trend analysis of the *UCR2*¹³ data from 1995 to 2001 revealed a 27 percent increase in reporting of intimate partner abuse incidents to participating police agencies. The 1999 GSS also noted a significant increase in the percentage of women victims of intimate partner abuse who reported to police, from 29 percent of women reporting to the *Violence Against Women Survey* in 1993 to 37 percent in 1999. A number of factors may have influenced the increase in reporting, including, for example, increased confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to effectively address intimate partner abuse cases, as well as changes in police reporting practices, reduced social stigma and greater awareness of the illegality of intimate partner violence and of available services.

For 93 percent of women and 79 percent of men, the reason they reported the intimate partner abuse to the police was to stop the violence or to receive protection from the police against the violence. For some victims at risk, particularly those who are socially and economically marginalized, including Aboriginal and low-income victims, as well as victims in rural or remote communities, police are often the only source of accessible immediate help.

Police Response

UCR2 data for 2000 indicate that charges were laid in 82 percent of intimate partner abuse incidents reported to police; the remaining 18 percent of incidents were cleared otherwise. In 13 percent of cases, police did not lay charges at the request of the victim. Police exercised their discretion and did not lay charges in 3 percent of all incidents. These proportions have remained relatively stable since trend data have been available through the *UCR2* in 1995.

There are a few reported studies on the issue of police charging practices in intimate partner abuse cases. A ten-year study of the pre- and post-charging policy's implementation in London, Ontario revealed that the number of charges laid by police in intimate partner abuse cases rose from 2.9 percent in 1979 (pre-policy) to 67 percent in 1983 and to 89 percent in 1990.

How has the implementation of the charging policy been viewed by key actors?

Intimate partner abuse victims and victims' service providers have expressed strong support for the pro-charge policy. For example, a 1996 study on the experience with the mandatory charging policy in the Yukon reported that 85 percent of victims thought that the mandatory policy of charging, regardless of the victim's preferences, was a good one. A further 68 percent of victims reported that the policy made them more confident about reporting future incidents. Similarly, a review of the experiences of service providers working with ethno-cultural women victims of intimate partner abuse indicates support for the mandatory charging policy. Since it removes responsibility for the decision to charge from the victim, it underscores the importance of the societal message that intimate partner abuse is unacceptable, and it empowers women.

¹³ *The Incident Based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey* captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported to police, including characteristics of victims, accused persons and incidents.

As already noted, the 1999 GSS reported that the reason given by 93 percent of women victims who reported intimate partner abuse to police was that they wanted the violence to end. For these women, calling the police translates into an expectation that this will make the police attend at the scene, which will, in turn, stop the current incident of violence. Intimate partner abuse victims clearly want the violence to end and, for most women, this is synonymous with the pro-charging policy. However, for many victims, it is not synonymous with a pro-prosecution policy.

An unintended negative consequence of the successful implementation of the charging policy has been its effect on intimate partner abuse victims who are members of over-criminalized communities. In particular, Aboriginal, lower income, visible minority and immigrant women are sometimes more reluctant to call the police in response to intimate partner abuse incidents for fear of the repercussions of discriminatory treatment of their partner, their children or themselves.

Police reaction to the pro-charging policy has been mixed. In the ten-year study of the pre- and post-charging policy's implementation in London, Ontario, police perception that the policy is effective had increased from one third in 1985 (four years after its adoption) to just over one half (52.3 percent) in 1990 (nine years after its adoption). In 1990, while almost one-half (48.1 percent) of these police officers believed that the policy helped battered women, two-thirds (64.9 percent) believed that the policy provided an important message to the community. Lastly, this study found that police officers with more years of experience and those in supervisory positions held the most positive views on the policy, as compared to constables.

Conclusions

The pro-charging policies adopted in Canada during the 1980s have significantly contributed to the strengthening of the criminal justice system's response to intimate partner abuse. Research on intimate partner abuse confirms that there has been an increase in the reporting of intimate partner abuse incidents, as well as in the number of charges laid in these cases. It has also demonstrated a positive impact in reducing the incidence of re-offending.

While it is not possible to attribute the improved criminal justice system response solely to the adoption of the pro-charging policies, clearly the policies have played an integral role toward this end. Although it is also true that the pro-charging policies have resulted in some unintended negative consequences, the majority of intimate partner abuse victims nonetheless express strong support for the pro-charge policy. An intimate partner abuse victim needs to know that if she calls the police to report an incident of violence, the police will come and will, at a minimum, stop the immediate incident of violence. The pro-charging policy ensures a strong and consistent first line of response by the criminal justice system that contributes to ensuring the safety and security of intimate partner abuse victims.

Pro-Prosecution Policy

The pro-prosecution policy has several objectives:

- promoting more rigorous prosecution of cases;
- reducing case attrition by reducing the number of withdrawals or stays of charges;
- promoting victim cooperation in the prosecution; and
- reducing re-offending.

Research conducted shortly after the adoption of the policy indicates some level of success in reducing the case attrition rate in intimate partner assault cases. In the London, Ontario ten-year study, researchers found that prior to the adoption of the policy, 38.4 percent of charges were dismissed or withdrawn. In 1983 (two years after the adoption of the policy), this rate had decreased to 16.4 percent. It had decreased further to 10.9 percent by 1990.

The most frequently cited reason for staying or withdrawing intimate partner abuse charges is the reluctance of the witness and the lack of other evidence. Some Crown Attorneys have commented that the reluctant female intimate partner abuse victim is more common than not and is a matter of considerable frustration for them. Faced with this reality, it is not surprising to learn that some Crown Attorneys find the pro-prosecution policy to be rigid and an unreasonable constraint on their exercise of discretion, to be impractical and to improperly treat all intimate partner assault cases the same.

A way of addressing this problem is to more actively and effectively support the victim throughout the prosecution. One recent study found that the two most important determinants of victim cooperation in the prosecution of an intimate partner abuse case were the availability of victim/witness assistance and support and the availability of videotaped testimony. This same study also found that when a prosecutor perceives a victim to be cooperative, the prosecutor is seven times more likely to prosecute that case than one involving a victim who is perceived to be uncooperative.

Faced with a reluctant, uncooperative victim, Crown Attorneys will stay or withdraw the charges absent other reliable and admissible evidence. Such independent evidence might include statements from other witnesses, 911 tape recordings, medical records of injuries sustained, photographs or videotape by police of the scene and of the victim and other physical evidence.

While most intimate partner abuse victims are very supportive of a pro-charging policy, primarily because it serves to stop the violence, at least in the immediate instance, many victims have expressed a desire for a more flexible prosecution policy that better addresses the needs and realities of victims and their families.

Other researchers have identified additional factors that influence an intimate partner abuse victim's level of cooperation with the prosecution. Victim cooperation is more likely:

- when the victim receives much-needed social support from family and friends, including, for example, financial assistance and assistance with childcare; and
- when the victim receives timely and continuous information about the criminal justice system and about the status of her case, as well as support throughout the process.

The research clearly documents some frustrations with the policy by prosecutors, victims and the public alike. Some prosecutors express unhappiness about being expected to prosecute cases absent a cooperative victim/witness. Some victims do not want to support a prosecution against, or to testify against, a partner with whom they have reconciled. Some victims, on the other hand, are of the view that the criminal justice system still does not treat intimate partner abuse seriously enough, as reflected by the sentences imposed on intimate partner abusers. As well, members of the public often voice opposition to a process or policy that does not uniformly lead to the traditional criminal justice response, namely, incarceration.

Domestic Violence Courts

The criminal justice system has traditionally been focused on incidents occurring between strangers, and, not surprisingly, the introduction of family relationships into this traditional paradigm poses challenges. Of these challenges, observers cite the high proportion of recanting and reluctant victims/witnesses and the ambiguous impacts of dispositions on perpetrators and victims. Further, in some jurisdictions there is a concern that systemic pressure on the courts prevents a thorough hearing of domestic violence cases.

Domestic violence courts have been established to permit a focus on the special nature of these cases by court officials who have an understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner abuse. Systems or protocols have been developed to support coordination within the justice process and beyond in a way that addresses the dynamics of domestic violence within a context of specially tailored court case management strategies.

Ontario Domestic Violence Courts Program

Ontario has introduced a comprehensive, province-wide Domestic Violence Justice Strategy in response to the May/iles Inquest and the 1999 recommendations of the Joint Committee on Domestic Violence.

In early 1997, Ontario began piloting two specialized courts for domestic violence cases in Toronto, one in North York (an early intervention model) and one in downtown Toronto (a coordinated prosecution model). In 1997-98, these pilots were expanded to six other sites, and then the models were combined in all sites. The four objectives of these courts are:

- to intervene early in domestic violence situations;
- to provide better support to victims throughout the criminal justice process;
- to more effectively prosecute these cases; and
- to hold offenders accountable for their behaviour.

The approach reflected in the two models is now being combined in centres that are implementing this specialized court process.

The early intervention stream (which emphasizes early access to treatment) for offenders who have no prior convictions for domestic violence, who did not use a weapon in the commission of the offence and who caused no significant harm to the victim are often used in situations where the victim and offender wish to reconcile. This permits the accused to plead guilty and, as a condition of bail, be ordered to attend a Partner Assault Response (PAR) program. A specialized Crown Attorney does the screening. The Victim/Witness Assistance Program consults with the victim and provides information and referrals to community resources. On completion by the offender, the PAR program provides a report to the Crown. If satisfactory, that report can be considered as a mitigating factor in sentencing. The Crown usually recommends a conditional discharge. If the accused does not successfully complete the program, bail conditions are considered to have been breached and the individual can be processed by the prosecution stream.

The coordinated prosecution stream focuses on the collection of corroborating evidence, in addition to victim testimony (such as 911 tapes, photos of injuries or damage, medical reports, witness testimony and audio or videotaped victim statements).

Moyer and Associates evaluated the initial sixteen to eighteen months of the Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) Program. At each site, more evidence of some type was gathered and respondents agreed that police investigations had improved, at least to some degree. In the majority of sites, case processing times decreased significantly. As all participants in the early intervention programs pleaded guilty, the proportion of guilty pleas increased significantly in these sites compared to the pre-project period.

The majority of victims in the early intervention sites met with or had been contacted by the Crown or the Victim/Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) soon after the incident.

Overall, there were fewer referrals to the early intervention projects than expected. Evaluators hypothesize that there was little incentive to participate because first-time offenders typically received a conditional discharge before the project was implemented and 50 percent had charges withdrawn, stayed or dismissed.

To date, twenty sites have implemented a specialized DVC process. Ontario has committed to expanding this specialized process on a province-wide basis. All fifty-four court jurisdictions will have either a specialized court with designated staff to handle domestic violence cases or a specialized process for doing so. Regardless of size, all jurisdictions will have a specialized process with the following components:

- an active advisory committee to support the work of the specialized DVC process (a Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee, or DVCAC);
- interpreters (to help non-English and non-French speakers communicate with police, Crown Attorneys and victim support staff);

- enhanced investigative procedures for police (including use of a risk indicator tool);
- designated VWAP staff specially trained to give support and information to victims;
- designated Crown Attorneys specially trained in prosecuting domestic violence cases to produce consistency and continuity;
- specialized counselling programs for abusive partners; and
- specialized processing to expedite cases and ensure coordination of services.

In medium-size and small rural sites, these components may be implemented differently based on the volume of cases and the size of the jurisdiction. For example, rather than designated staff or a dedicated courtroom, specially trained staff may be available.

Victim Services

The objectives of domestic violence victims frequently conflict with those of the justice system. Many victims have goals other than legal sanctions, such as staying in their home, preserving their relationship, obtaining counselling for their partners and protecting themselves and their children. Even with a prosecutorial policy to proceed with charges wherever possible, unwilling victims find ways to circumvent the criminal justice process; by failing to attend court, by showing strong reluctance to testify and by changing their evidence on the witness stand.

Governments have responded by providing services to support victims of intimate partner violence who are involved with the criminal justice system. Victim services, in this context, are defined to mean services provided as a result of the victim's involvement with the criminal justice system, as distinct from other services, such as shelters, that may be provided to victims. While the objective of all such programs is to provide for the victim's safety and wellbeing, some victim services have the implicit (and sometimes the explicit) objective of ensuring that the victims cooperate with justice system processing—so that they do not change their testimony or otherwise withdraw their cooperation from the criminal proceedings.

Overview of Victim Services

The nature of services provided varies at the local level, reflecting the needs and capacity of individual communities. Volunteers and community agencies first offered many of these services and they continue to play a vital role.

Ontario is fast expanding and integrating its support to victims through its newly created Victim Services Division within the Ministry of the Attorney General, which brings together all victim services from three justice ministries. Currently, the Victim Services Division is responsible for the Victim Witness Assistance Program, now in forty-two sites and expanding to all fifty-four court jurisdictions, in addition to police and community-based victims' services.

As well, funding has been provided:

- for approximately one hundred and nineteen transitional support workers throughout the province who provide support to abused women (not tied to the justice system);
- for approximately one hundred counselling programs for abused women;
- for approximately one hundred and thirty-one support groups within the Early Intervention Program for Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence; and
- for a province-wide Assaulted Women's Helpline and enhanced crisis line services for the francophone community.

Key components of an effective victim service are as follows:

- intervention as soon as possible following the incident;
- access and referral to a continuum of services;
- services that recognize the unique needs of intimate partner abuse victims;
- collaboration and coordination among agencies providing services;
- clarity of roles (between criminal justice-based victim services and community support agencies); and
- availability of information and effective communication mechanisms among players within, and external to, the justice system.

Abusive Partner Intervention Programs

Intervention programs for men who assault their partners were initiated during the late 1970s, initially as educational groups promoting anti-sexist beliefs and subsequently incorporating cognitive and behavioural therapeutic techniques. Group treatment became a popular sanction of the courts in the wake of pro-arrest legislation of the 1980s in the United States. Groups for abusive partners often employ a mixture of theoretical approaches, although most are based on a feminist model developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota, which asserts that male violence is part of a spectrum of efforts to control women. Program length may vary from as little as one day to thirty-two weeks, but, most often, programs last approximately sixteen weeks.

Intervention programs have rarely been subjected to rigorous scientific investigation. Moreover, research on the impact of abusive partners' intervention programs on recidivism has produced conflicting results. There is little evidence that one form of intervention is more successful than others or that longer programs are more effective. However, although empirical evidence is highly limited, there is some basis for hypothesizing that some batterers may fare better in treatment (or fare better in certain types of treatment) than others. There is evidence that violence toward intimates is harder to treat in abusers with longer and more serious histories of violence toward intimates, longer criminal records of violence toward strangers and traumatic violence exposure as children. It is important to recognize that intervention programs may be more effective for some abusers than others (and, in fact, may be totally ineffective or harmful for some perpetrators).

Abusive partner intervention and treatment programs are offered in most Canadian jurisdictions. All programs offer group counselling, sometimes supplemented by individual counselling and a specialized curriculum, generally based on the dynamics of power and control. Many provide complementary counselling or frequent contact with the abusive partner. Some programs are offered by justice ministries; others are provided by departments of health or social services or by private agencies funded by government. In London, Changing Ways runs a group program for abusive men. The agency also has a partner contact program.

Ontario is expanding the number of Partner Assault Response programs as part of its Domestic Violence Justice Strategy and specialized court approach. Indeed, this expansion is an integral element in the model. Programs exist in approximately one third of the court jurisdictions in Ontario now. Once the justice strategy is complete, all fifty-four areas will have programs. Offenders pay a portion of the cost to promote accountability and responsibility, but this is done on an “ability-to-pay” basis. In the post-plea referral program, selected offenders who plead guilty and successfully complete a treatment program are given a conditional sentence.

Training

All Canadian jurisdictions have mounted training initiatives with the objective of improving the response of the justice system to incidents of domestic violence. Most jurisdictions have developed excellent training materials, which emphasize teamwork involving multidisciplinary partners, the dynamics of domestic violence, elements of the legislation, policies and protocols, the roles of the various criminal justice agencies and the primacy of victim safety.

In Ontario, new Crown Attorneys and those who wish to be designated domestic violence specialists must take a one-week summer course on domestic violence. A new Ministry-certified Ontario Provincial Police College domestic violence course for special investigators is now offered and new probation staff, to be hired as part of the Domestic Violence Justice Strategy, will receive special training.

A recent review of provincial and territorial domestic violence legislation and implementation strategies identified some important aspects of successful training initiatives:

- training is an ongoing function rather than a one-time occurrence.
- training is as much about assessing and developing capacity as it is about providing information;
- ongoing training of all justice workers is essential because of the high turnover of staff and declining policy compliance in the absence of refresher training; and
- resource issues and the absence of a focal point of responsibility for ensuring training delivery affect the ability of jurisdictions to sustain training initiatives.

Risk Assessment

In addition to improving existing services and exploring new initiatives and coordinated efforts to increase the safety of women assaulted by their intimate partners, women’s

activists, researchers, and public policy makers have tried to improve their understanding of their ability to assess risk related to both re-offending and lethality or dangerousness. The science of predicting domestic violence is in its infancy. Data on the reliability, validity and predictive accuracy of risk assessment tools are so scarce as to be “practically non-existent.” As few empirical studies have sought to distinguish risk markers, it is not possible to identify with certainty a particular set of characteristics that may be used to determine whether individuals are at risk of perpetrating or becoming victims of domestic violence. Despite every effort based on knowledge to date, there is no way to guarantee safety for victims of intimate partner violence. However, a number of factors have been identified as correlates of risk for perpetration of domestic violence and for domestic violence victimization.

Some of the cautions associated with the use of lethality assessment tools are summarized as follows:

- it is better to assert that factors are associative or correlative, as correlation is not proof of causation;
- lethal outcomes may depend on the availability of other services (for example, emergency medical services available to avert death in one location may not be present in another);
- it is impossible to measure the intensity of those cases that will escalate to death in a way that can be translated into a standardized assessment tool, as the meaning of variables (such as the intensity of entrapment) depends on the victims’ subjective experiences;
- as domestic homicide may occur without a long history of abuse or service provider involvement, it is imperative not to provide women with a false sense of security when few of the typical antecedents are present, as there may be value in women understanding that any violent relationship may end in homicide;
- as use of the instruments presupposes a population of women who will complete questionnaires, assessment of risk is likely to exclude a large number of women from diverse populations who may be reluctant to disclose information to advocates, police or other criminal justice personnel (moreover, since most of the instruments are only available in English, assessments will likely exclude many women from non-English-speaking communities); and
- the use of tools that employ check boxes may be impersonal, reducing women’s experience to a final score at the very time when they most need individualized care and respect.

Despite these difficulties, and though empirical studies are few, there is early evidence to suggest that risk assessments used in safety planning for victims of intimate partner violence may provide additional insights, help victims adopt new safety measures or help parties match safety planning to specific dangers. Use of assessment tools in relation to repeated or escalating violence may encourage coordination among multiple service providers, expose justice officials to issues they might not otherwise consider and provide a “touchstone” for victims themselves, a lens through which they can see their situation.

As part of Ontario's Domestic Violence Justice Strategy, police will be collecting data using a *Domestic Violence Supplementary Report Form* (DVSR), which includes a risk assessment component. A guide to completing the form includes information on the value of a sworn videotaped statement and the process for obtaining one, a rationale for the risk assessment tool and the process for soliciting information, as well as information on a safety plan for the victim and children. Information collected is critical and will be used at various stages of the justice process by police, Crown Attorneys and Victim Witness Assistance Program staff.

The Ad Hoc Committee concludes that, while further research is being conducted on the tools, it is too early to speak to their utility or effectiveness in decision making.

Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Auditing, monitoring and accountability mechanisms allow jurisdictions to assess the effectiveness of strategies and to ensure compliance. To track the progress of cases through the justice system and to assess the impact of program and process changes on an ongoing basis, a jurisdiction needs an integrated information system. The capacity of jurisdictions to track cases from the point of a call to police through sentence completion is severely limited, as, for the most part, justice information systems do not link components (police, the Crown and Correctional Services).

Virtually all public inquiries, coroners' inquests and government investigations into incidents of intimate partner homicide have decried the lack of comprehensive information regarding the justice system's response to incidents of family violence and have recommended the development of integrated information systems.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics at Statistics Canada is currently assessing the feasibility of linking police, courts and corrections data in order to address questions related to sentencing patterns and recidivism among intimate partner violence perpetrators. Most court systems, except specialized domestic violence courts, do not identify the sex of the victims or the relationship between the victims and the accused. This information is critical for identifying intimate partner violence cases, since there is no specific Criminal Code offence of "intimate partner violence." Police statistics do identify these characteristics of the victims and the accused, so linking police and courts data will provide much needed information concerning the processing and treatment of these cases at various stages of the criminal justice system. Results of the feasibility work are expected within two to three years.

Coordinating Mechanisms

It is widely acknowledged that because of the nature and complexity of intimate partner abuse, legal controls or sanctions alone are not a sufficient response to these behaviours. A number of studies have concluded that formal (legal) sanctions are more effective when reinforced by informal social controls and are weakened when those controls are absent.

One of the earliest models of coordination was implemented in London, Ontario, where the first research studies on the impact of charge and arrest policies in Canadian jurisdictions were carried out. In most jurisdictions, regional or local committees have been established, generally with representation from the criminal justice system and community organizations, and sometimes with representatives from other disciplines, such as education, social services and health. These committees promote the implementation of a coordinated community response.

Elements of an Effective Response

In her review of the existing coordinating mechanisms in provincial and territorial jurisdictions, Carolyn Marshall offers the following observations;

Coordination needs to happen at all levels to be effective. It also takes staff to do the work and a commitment of resources to carry out activities. These (coordinating) bodies need a mandate to coordinate; [one] that is supported by real commitment at the top and that is enforceable. Partnership is a very time-consuming process, but no more so than the resources spent on uncoordinated policies, programs and service delivery systems. Coordination is difficult in part because it operates, by definition, across professional disciplines and departmental boundaries. Typically the coordination function comes with responsibility, but is not supported by the authority to make it happen. Accountability mechanisms tend to be weak if not supported by the senior management of multiple departments/stakeholders. When coordination works, it is in spite of this and is usually the product of partnership and trust-building efforts.

Coordination needs to occur across policy sectors (social, justice, education and health) and at all levels within each jurisdiction:

- at the provincial level (to establish a policy framework);
- at the local community level (to coordinate services and to identify needs, gaps and solutions); and
- at the individual level (to provide effective case management and conferencing mechanisms).

Challenges

There is increasing recognition that a coordinated response is required; one that integrates criminal justice, social service, mental health and community responses. The fact that this goal has been difficult to achieve is not surprising. For one thing, criminal justice institutions are asked to make links to social services agencies in domestic violence cases that they are not asked to make in other types of crimes. Traditionally, the overriding objective of the criminal justice system has been the detection and sanction of perpetrators of crime. Reforms that address empowerment and support of victims have challenged the legal system's culture, processes and priorities. The ambiguity of goals can cause difficulty at the operational level for police and the Crown.

The challenge to jurisdictions in adopting models of coordination is to create an effective model and vest it with sufficient authority and support to ensure that large and unwieldy systems coordinate their responses. Jurisdictions should be under no illusion that coordination and partnership are easy. They are time consuming, and different philosophical frameworks and departmental priorities augment the challenges. Most difficult, however, is the challenge of ensuring a sustainable response to intimate partner abuse in the absence of an overall coordinated structure or model.

It is important to remember that a majority of women experiencing woman abuse still do not report to the police. Although the reporting rates are increasing, in 1999, still only 37 percent of women had reported to the police.

The above section has been excerpted from the *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation*, prepared for the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice. The full report is available at:

<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/reports/spousal.html>

The Local Context

Police Response

Policing within the geographic area of Middlesex County is a complicated affair. There are several services at work; the London Police Service is responsible for the City of London, the Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service is responsible for the town of Strathroy and Caradoc Township, and the Ontario Provincial Police are responsible for rural areas of Middlesex County.

The First Nations Reserves of Muncey and Chippewa and the settlement of Oneida have their own services. These services are not held accountable under the Police Service Act or the Adequacy Standards.

Inevitably there are inconsistencies in the organization of responses to woman abuse, in philosophies about woman abuse and in the experiences of both police and community members.

London Police acknowledge the value of training and interaction with organizations outside of the criminal justice system in addressing woman abuse;

Since '81, we have had ongoing training. We were amongst the first police services to have this kind of training. It gave very specific instruction on how to respond to any woman victim of crime. We are better at responding now than in '81.

Through community partners, London police are much more aware of domestic violence and the litany of factors that influence it; financial, medical, self-confidence, family pressures, religious, cultural pressures, children, the woman thinks no one will ever love her, fear of criminal justice system, fear of police, fear of reprisal.

Within the London Police Service, we have been trying to understand the issue more holistically. There has been a growth in awareness and understanding.

In December 2000, London created the position of Domestic Violence Coordinator. This coordinator reviews all cases of domestic violence;

I try to get officers to broaden their perspective, to use a non-judgmental approach. The duty of an officer is to investigate and lay charges as appropriate.

The Middlesex County detachment of the OPP also implemented a local decision to have a Domestic Violence Coordinator. This could become a regional policy, but right now it is decided detachment by detachment and the Middlesex County Domestic Violence Coordinator is the only one in the province. The position has been in existence for two years. The Coordinator is on-call around the clock. It is her role to talk to the victims and to take over the investigation. The position was created because the Service saw a gap in meeting the needs of victims of crime. Now the Coordinator develops a relationship with

the woman. This provides consistency for court preparation and Crown briefs and an enhanced investigation. It is seen as a model for this kind of work.

While the model definitely has its strengths, a note of caution was sounded;

The down side is that other officers don't learn how to deal well with domestic situations. We are trying to develop this expertise in other officers, to have one on each platoon.

We have to make sure that we aren't creating inept officers that don't want to make decisions and that don't have skills to deal with women abuse situations. Every officer should take the three-day domestic violence training session. It should not be reserved for sergeants and specialized positions.

In Strathroy-Caradoc, an officer fills a role similar to the Domestic Violence Coordinator in London. He reports dealing with a couple of cases of domestic violence a month. On scene, officers provide women with information about Women's Rural Resource Centre. The shelter requires women to make the call themselves if she wants assistance from them. The officer was somewhat frustrated that the shelter will not call a woman;

I'm frustrated that I can't get someone to call women. In [another jurisdiction] women filled out a form, agreeing to let someone call them and giving permission to disclose what was in the police report.

This service provides follow-up if a situation involves more than a simple arrest. The police will answer questions after a woman is in the shelter. They are making an effort to ensure some contact occurs with the woman to let her know what is going on once an arrest is made.

WRRC does send over requests for high-risk assessments. A supervisor will do a CPIC check so that police know who they are dealing with. An inspector also reviews all reports.

Several officers from smaller police services outside of London noted that there may be a definite advantage for women who report to them because the same officer will be able to follow their case through to resolution. As a result, they will get more individualized attention and have better access to immediate information about what is going on in their case.

Representatives from the London Police Service, which has the longest history of specific training in the area of woman abuse, acknowledge that applying criminal offenses to a broader definition of woman abuse that goes beyond physical assault is a challenge. But as their understanding of the dynamics of woman abuse broadens, they are making headway.

We are beginning to see how to lay charges related to other offenses, for example, damage to property and pet abuse.

We are trying to see how emotional abuse fits within a criminal code charge. Criminal harassment is where these dynamics fit. Criminal harassment law has given police an important tool. Recently there was an increase in the maximum penalty from five to ten years.

Police Services have to rely on specific procedures in order to carry out their work. After working hours, police can get a search warrant or a Feeney warrant by fax. A Feeney warrant is an authorization to enter a subject's residence to arrest him/her on an outstanding arrest warrant. They cannot get an arrest warrant by fax. If a person has a valid arrest warrant outstanding for his/her arrest, they can arrest them anywhere they find them on the strength of the warrant, but they cannot enter their dwelling. For that they get a Feeney warrant. Feeney was the name of the person arrested that this decision is based upon.

A respondent expressed concern that funding cutbacks, which have limited Police access to Justices of the Peace, have made it more difficult to get warrants when they are needed;

Justices of the Peace used to be available 24-7. Sometimes police would even drive to a J.P.'s house to get a warrant.

This respondent believes that the lack of around the clock access to a Justice of the Peace left a gap that resulted in dire consequence;

In Vanessa Bol's case¹⁴, the accused went to Vanessa's house. The police were waiting for an arrest warrant. He was stopped for a traffic violation, but because the arrest warrant hadn't been signed yet, he wasn't picked up. He killed her the next day.

She describes another case that could also have had a devastating outcome;

There was a case where a man barricaded himself in a house with dogs and guns. It took eleven hours for a search warrant to be signed.

In the past, there was a time lag between the point when an officer applied for an arrest warrant and the point when the warrant was issued. Information about the warrant would be entered into the Canadian Police Information Centre (C.P.I.C.) system when the warrant was issued. The London Police Service has acted to address this gap in a way that will benefit police services across the province. They consulted with the Canadian Police Information Centre Advisory Council about using an existing special risk category to put an individual on the system before a warrant is issued. A "Special Interest Police Category" entry into the C.P.I.C. system will give an officer enough information to

¹⁴ Vanessa Bol was killed by her ex-partner on November 3, 2003.

provide reasonable grounds for detention. A phone number is also provided so that an officer can make a phone call to get more information, if needed, for an arrest. The London Police Service has checked with the Ministry of the Attorney General to ensure that this procedure meets ministry standards. They have also worked with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the governing body of C.P.I.C. to ensure that this solution is implemented across the province.

Despite a long history of a coordinated community response in London, some respondents still voiced concerns about police response to woman abuse. Specific concerns about rural and First Nations communities are presented separately in subsequent sections;

The bottom line is that they are often not really well assisted by police in all instances. Family Consultants are excellent.

Officers need more training on why women stay. They are frustrated with seeing the same cases several times.

The husband and wife have the same matrimonial rights to property. The Police can't remove the man unless they lay charges. If charges are not laid, the woman has to go to a shelter, sometimes with kids in the middle of the night. That is a problem in terms of what happens. It's so difficult to round every one up and leave.

Police can only respond to those situations that are reported to them. Several considerations about why woman abuse may not be reported surfaced;

Sexual preference also impacts reporting and hiding. We do track police involvement in same sex relationships and it's a whole different dynamic.

The Mennonite society generally doesn't call the police.

Because the Portuguese community is so closed, we may not get the reporting.

Under-reporting is an issue amongst First Nations people. Sexual abuse and child abuse are also under-reported.

There's a perception that the mandatory charging policy has reduced the tendency of women to involve police for purposes of warning.

Some respondents voiced other doubts about the mandatory charging policy. Respondents generally recognized it as an important historical development that helped enormously to take woman abuse from the realm of the private out into the public. Yet they noted some downsides as well;

Mandatory charging policy can put the woman at risk.

Mandatory charging takes power away from women. How could we achieve some balance between giving women control over their own lives and assuring their safety?

With zero tolerance and mandatory charging, everyone was getting arrested for every transgression. The pendulum is coming more to the centre. We still must investigate, but sometimes charges can unnecessarily complicate people's lives.

Risk Assessment

According to a recent news release from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services,¹⁵

The government is conducting a pilot project to train police officers, Crown Attorneys and others working in the criminal justice system to better assess risk in abusive situations. Using the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment tool, they will learn to quickly identify 'predictors' for domestic violence to reoccur. This risk assessment tool was developed to respond to jury recommendations that came from the May/iles and Hadley inquests.

This new risk assessment tool was developed by the OPP and the mental health centre at Penetanguishine. Some respondents expressed concern that this tool is inadequate in assessing lethality; it does not ask key questions about increase in violence, recent separation of the partners, access to weapons, abuse of pets, stalking behaviour, etc. They believe that a risk assessment must be more than a list of yes/no questions (ODARA is thirteen questions with yes/no answers). This has led some women's advocates to take the position that, while risk assessment is important, in Ontario, we may not be using the best tool available.

Policing in First Nations Communities

Many respondents agreed that;

There are unclear lines of responsibility for responding to woman abuse on reservations.

They outlined the kinds of problems that these jurisdictional complications created and were linked to;

There are jurisdiction problems. There is a huge gap, but putting more police out there may not create more safety. They will pick and choose what they deal with. They have their own services, but they are not held accountable under the Police Service Act or Adequacy Standards. The first response is from their service. They

¹⁵ News Release from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Transmitted by Canada NewsWire on August 9, 2004 10:31

don't have to investigate. If they are unable to respond, the OPP may respond. Response may be very uneven.

Sometimes women call police and the police don't show up. Women have no trust. They won't call police.

New Year's Day, a woman waited for police for three hours. While she waited for police, he broke in and started beating her. Her children witnessed it.

There are very strained relations between OPP and First Nations. Reserves don't want OPP unless the situation is very serious. They have to get permission to go on reserve from the band leader. Attitudes of mistrust are a big barrier. Officers have been shot at; cruisers have been set on fire.

In terms of successfully prosecuting men from reserves that are not adequately policed, it's difficult. There are time delays, inadequate investigation. We may not see the charges at all. Women are not willing participants in the criminal justice system. They are not adequately supported. They have to go back and live in that environment.

A woman can call the OPP and they will not respond. Response is fragmented and because of mistrust, when an emergency happens, you can't be sure of a coordinated police service.

The OPP are not welcome. There are many examples of why. There was a stolen car that stopped in a field with hunters. The [OPP] dogs went after hunters. The hunters asked the OPP to call off dogs or they would shoot them. The young man is charged with threatening an OPP officer. The man was employed. Now he is not able to work and this creates family stress. It's one example of mistrust of the legal system and Canadian law. The Indian Act is Canadian law and very racist.

Particularly in First Nations communities there is no respect for the law because it is the law that oppresses us. It's evident in what happened at Ipperwash. Dudley George is a high profile case, but this has happened many other times.

These policing problems in First Nations communities are not exclusive to the OPP. A respondent noted that;

Before 1965, the RCMP policed reserves. There were also bad experiences then.

Some respondents offered some historical perspective on how policing problems have been exacerbated;

There is not adequate policing in any of the communities. There is no twenty-four-hour policing. They are small services. It has been an issue since the Feds offered policing to reserves. In the past, the whole security was managed by a

service of voluntary Peacekeepers in Oneida. You could call them and they would check things out. They were even effective in dealing with stolen cars. They would keep them from coming into the community or advise police where to find vehicles, rather than have high-speed chases. When you saw the police, they were with these guys and you could trust these guys.

Then three years ago, they parachuted officers into the community through a policing agreement. They set up parallel policing systems, but they didn't pay the peacekeepers. As the officers became more involved with the OPP, the payroll went through the OPP; the Peacekeepers fell by the wayside.

The only security available now is through family. Those three guys can't guarantee your safety.

Longhouse people used to patrol up until the 80s. They hired some peacekeepers to work with the longhouse people. The police officers were paid, but the longhouse people were not, and eventually they gave it up. A system of voluntarily protecting women and children was eroded. There wasn't enough money to adequately replace that service.

They didn't build on existing law enforcement and peacekeeping systems. They imposed new systems on us. It would have worked better to build on these systems, to offer them adequate resources, to let them build relations with the OPP or other off-reserve services.

In thinking about how to begin addressing these serious problems, respondents made some insightful remarks;

Imposing our help on native populations is not the answer. Our London Police Service liaison officer is beginning the discussion with the communities.

Native elders see crime in the city and are trying to create solutions to clean up their own communities.

Policing is an example of where we need to do a lot more work in understanding First Nations communities. A group like the Chippewa is in a particular stage of development, not the same as London groups. It speaks to the need for community capacity building.

The OPP does not have capacity to develop relationships with different First Nations communities. More resources need to be committed to relationship building.

A representative of a police service that does not have a jurisdictional conflict with a First Nations community spoke of a very positive relationship with on-reserve police;

We have a good rapport with First Nations constables. We monitor their radios. We will sometimes provide back-up if needed. We have a good rapport. We don't challenge; we have a very respectful attitude. The Chief has gone down and sat with the band council. We might want to bridge on a case, but we will have to hand over our role to someone who is trusted by the community.

Prosecuting Domestic Violence Cases

In London, there is not a courtroom assigned to the prosecution of Domestic Violence cases, and we refer to a specialized process rather than a court. The specialized process is a recognition that this work requires training and that Crown Attorneys will have to work in conjunction with police, probation, victim services, the Family Consultants team and community agencies. The process is based on the belief that effectively prosecuting domestic violence cases will help to curtail domestic violence. There is a Domestic Violence Team of Crown Attorneys with specialized training. All Crowns get specific domestic violence training, but the team has more. The team supervises all prosecution of domestic violence. They screen files, meet with defendants and lawyers to discuss appropriate resolution and meet with victims as well. Part of the responsibility of the team is to be involved with the community.

Crown attorneys have a professional responsibility to be involved in the Domestic Court Advisory Committee. In London, they have been doing it longer than has been mandated. Training is ongoing for those involved in the prosecution of domestic violence. Every summer, for most of July and August, there are week-long sessions for all Crowns in the province. There are advanced and basic courses. There are four basic courses that all are required to take and one is the domestic violence course. That is the introductory level.

There are two major conventions each year for Crown Attorneys and in recent years there has been some coverage of domestic violence issues, including bail issues as identified by the May/les inquest. Domestic Violence Crowns have an annual conference along with Victim Witness Assistance Program coordinators from around the province, and there are various lectures and seminars by the Law Society or the Canadian Bar Association. Domestic Violence Crowns are encouraged to go. Crown Attorneys also do inter-office sessions with agencies such as the Children's Aid Society or the Child Witnessing Project.

Judges too are exposed to domestic violence training. Most judges and justices of the peace agree that training is needed. They have educational conferences and conventions where experts from related fields present. Generally they appreciate hearing about issues from the victim's perspective. The training is not provided at law school, so it has to come through experience and working with the community.

The specialized process has not been able to address all of the problems that arise in the prosecution of domestic violence cases. One of the issues for both sexual assault and domestic violence is the length of time between offence and resolution in courts. It is an ongoing issue for all criminal cases, but in violence cases it is serious and there is no easy answer because there are so many reasons that it takes a long time; lawyer of the accused

choice not being available, needed witnesses not being available, sometimes courts are overbooked. This is a big problem from perspective of victims, but it may never be completely resolved. Perhaps one of the best ways to deal with it is to keep victims informed about the status of their case and to keep communication with them open. Coordination with the Victim Witness Assistance Program and the Child Witness Project helps with that. Often the wait extends the crisis for women and/or lengthens the time that children whose mothers are caught up in these cases live with uncertainty about their futures.

Another respondent had a different type of complaint about the prosecution of Domestic Violence cases which highlights the need for the integration of the criminal justice system with other community-based support systems that abused women can access;

If everyone had come together when planning the Domestic Violence Court and decided how to allocate resources, we could have had a better system. Often those making decisions don't understand the nature of woman abuse. There was a lack of thought about the decisions being made. They did not ask, 'What will the long-term impact of the changes be?' We could have had a better domestic violence court that would not just have a criminal justice focus, but a comprehensive focus.

A respondent explains how inadequate resources in the community can have a negative impact on successful criminal prosecution of domestic violence cases;

There has been a big increase in the number of women needing referrals for service, but no place to refer them to. This causes great frustration for the criminal justice system, which wants women to cooperate. But the woman is not receiving enough support to feel strong enough to deal with the criminal justice system. I wish we had started with community support services first. Make an investment in the women. Women would be able to access service. They would be supported through the process, and the outcome would be the desired increase in convictions.

No Diversion Program for Women

The Early Intervention Program allows some men who are charged with domestic violence to complete a program at Changing Ways, get a positive report from them, and then be entitled to a conditional discharge with one year of probation. It also allows for communication and cohabitation in most cases while they are attending the program. There is no analogous program for women and this is problematic;

There are diversion programs for men, such that upon completion, they can almost always be assured of a conditional discharge. There is nothing similar for women, so first, no assurance of getting a conditional discharge and secondly, no similar rehabilitative program available.

Victim Witness Assistance Program

The Victim Witness Assistance Program supports victims and witnesses of crime so that they can more fully participate in criminal justice system. The court system can be intimidating, so this program informs victims and witnesses about the criminal justice system and gives them specific information about their case. Based on legislation, victims and witnesses have the right to information like court dates, what those dates mean, support when they appear and the right to have input into the system. This service is the liaison to the Crown Attorney and the police for the victim. The program informs victims about victim impact statements, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and any other tools available to them. It also provides court orientation and tips on how to prepare to give evidence. VWAP staff never talk about evidence and they must make full disclosure to the Crown's Office.

Court is only one part of the victim-witness' life. They also need some emotional wellbeing in order to participate in court. The program gives emotional support through debriefing, helps with safety planning if that is required and provides referrals.

The Crown Attorney's office relies on VWAP for coordinating interviews. All Crowns' Offices are different, but, in London, VWAP contacts victims after a charge is laid. They do an initial contact and, depending on the wishes of the victim, set up meetings with the Crown. An assigned coordinator at VWAP stays with the victim. There is an understanding that the worker at VWAP is their ongoing contact. It's like a circle or a triangle.

The downside to the service is that many people don't know about VWAP because of cultural issues, control of the perpetrator or language barriers. People in the system know about the service equally, but people who are not yet in the system are the concern. Would they decide to make a call if they knew about the service? VWAP is trying to bridge this gap by participating in community awareness forums and by placing brochures in other agencies for people who don't come in through justice sector.

Some comments indicated that although helpful, VWAP is not able to offer all that is needed for all abused women. They don't have enough coordinators to sit in court with every victim. The Crown Attorneys understand the facts within a legal framework, but this does not ensure that the victim feels that she knows the Crown and feels comfortable. There is recognition that the more time that can be spent with witnesses, the better the process will be for them and probably the better the process will go.

Despite agreement that VWAP is a useful and important program, it is not universally available to all women. Access is limited for those in rural areas;

In servicing the county, transportation is the big problem. There are no allocated funds to assist someone from county to get to the Victim Witness Assistance Program. Often, they have to do the work over the phone and this impedes the development of a good relationship.

Sometimes abused women find themselves dealing with Family Law and Criminal Law systems at the same time. This can be problematic, as a respondent explains;

VWAP can only help with the criminal system. Family Law Duty Counsel exists for support in the other system, but the systems are different. This makes it more dangerous for women.

Useful as the VWAP program is for women while they are in the Criminal Justice system, it does not replace other community-based supports. As a respondent reminds us;

VWAP can't provide ongoing support or counselling.

Conclusion

Clearly, London has been a leader in formulating and implementing effective criminal justice responses to woman abuse. This leadership has been widely recognized. But the intense learning process of the London Police Service has not been paralleled in the other services that work throughout Middlesex County. Cultural practices that discourage reporting are one reason why women may not report abuse. Fragmented policing with varying standards and accountability is another.

Improvements to the prosecutorial process, including the specialized domestic violence process and the Victim Witness Assistance Program have been implemented in London. No provisions for transportation for those living outside of the city have been built into these programs, and this means that many men and women face significant challenges when they must access them. The result of this uneven development is, not surprisingly, an uneven response to woman abuse throughout Middlesex County.

Even in London, despite years of collaborative work, not all respondents are pleased with the outcomes;

There are deep schisms between the legal systems and other support systems. We are still working in silos. Why can't we take up the concept of wraparound services?

Respondents inside and outside of the criminal justice system understand the importance of collaboration and integration. There is awareness that the cooperation of victims is needed to successfully prosecute woman abuse cases. But this can't happen without appropriate supports in the community. It takes the entire society working to end violence against women.

A respondent reminds us of the danger of an exclusionary focus on a criminal justice response to woman abuse;

Even if we were 100 percent effective in prosecuting and getting every abuser in treatment, that only represents a percentage of all cases.

Criminal Justice System responses have been and will continue to be an important part of addressing woman abuse. One respondent's remarks are a reminder that it is important to continuously evaluate what we are doing;

The police service's zero tolerance for violence and the mandatory charging policy has been an improvement. It's not a private issue anymore. The downside is that some women may not want to call police because charges will be laid. It does take power away from women. Police involvement creates other problems for women. Maybe women should have more of a say in having charges dropped.

NEGOTIATING CUSTODY AND ACCESS, CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS AND PROPERTY SETTLEMENTS

“I have become increasingly despairing about access to justice and the actual justice these women achieve.”

While much attention has been paid to the criminal response to woman abuse since the 1980s, the family law system and the potential pitfalls it holds for abused women have been largely ignored. A respondent who works within this system outlines her concerns;

Many women do not have resources to pursue cases with lawyers who can get them results against partners with lawyers who can get results. Many of these men are determined to see women bereft of anything.

When men are self-represented and women are not, it ends up costing women a lot. The men drag things out. Even if she is on a legal aid certificate, she is paying a lawyer for all the time. One way or another, she loses.

If a woman and a man are representing themselves, he can cross-examine her, and often he abuses her. No one stands up to intervene in that.

I have also seen women use up their money and get dropped by their lawyer.

Another lawyer echoes concerns that not all Family Law lawyers are well prepared to deal with women who are abused;

I have been trying to encourage the Family Law Bar to buy into a protocol. They could use some training around asking questions about woman abuse. All Family Law Counsel should get training on asking questions about abuse and learn how to refer. There is some resistance to taking this on. They see it as being social workers.

The provision of legal aid for women leaving abusive relationships is at best inadequate. There is simply not enough money in the system for abused women;

The Government did not provide more money to legal aid. You can't expect a woman to have a positive outcome if she does not have a lawyer.

For women who need lawyers, it is terrible. First, it is difficult to deal with Legal Aid. For women who are also in the criminal justice system, unless her likely outcome is incarceration, she cannot get access to legal aid.

A lack of adequate legal aid funding in the family law system has had devastating repercussions for women needing legal assistance;

Fewer lawyers are taking legal aid certificates, and many who are, are not doing a good job. Very few family lawyers will take legal aid certificates, so women are

accessing whatever lawyer will take the certificate. Sometimes they are getting estate lawyers. If a woman has a legal aid worker that isn't familiar with woman abuse and s/he misses dates, etc. this reflects badly on her.

Also, not enough hours are given. In the family law system, before going to trial, you must make every effort to go to case conferences before going to court. Women are running out of hours before they get to court.

Lawyers are not giving women their full attention or are rushing them. A lot of women believe their lawyers are not hearing and not believing them. Often there is a communication problem. Other times women are being badly served.

Women are not able to change lawyers on legal aid certificates.

Although the legal aid assistance currently available to abused women who can apply for it is clearly insufficient, some women are excluded even from this level of support;

There are the working poor who aren't eligible for legal aid.

There has been some speculation that more pro bono work can defuse the need for legal aid to be more pro-active in helping people. A respondent voiced her doubts about the efficacy of this approach;

As a bencher with the Law Society, I am aware of the push for pro bono work. Small firms do that all the time. They spend way more time than they are paid for. Pro bono is an area that should be used in big firms. Big firms tend not to do family law. It's messy law that deals with real people. These are not cases that lawyers take pro bono. They are too difficult and too complicated. They are messy and they are emotional.

This grossly inadequate legal support for abused women must be considered against the backdrop of an increasingly well organized movement of men who are determined to undermine women's legal rights;

The father's rights movement is gaining in momentum, and there is a lot of money behind them. They are supporting particular politicians. Judges are appointed by politicians. They are gaining system-wide influence.

Sometimes women go to court by themselves. The man has joined a father's rights group and he will show up with a group of men and a high profile lawyer.

And their influence is being felt in policy forums as well;

There is a push for shared custody in the Divorce Act provisions. If you look at stats from the U.S., this does not work when you are dealing with people who cannot communicate about anything. Generally speaking, we are talking about

men who are controllers. This is not the clientele where parents have a shared vision. Joint custody allows abusive partners to keep track and keep control of women. Courts rarely give no access to abusive fathers. Sometimes they offer supervised access, and that's helpful, but not as often they could.

Models for Supporting Women in the Family Law System

London is home to two programs that assist people to deal with the family law system. In 1998, a local lawyer who had represented primarily women, many of whom were abused, changed the nature of her practice. She met with representatives of front line services to propose that she work on-site in shelters and other agencies that assist abused women to provide one on one legal advice on family matters. She works in London, Strathroy and St. Thomas. Her fees are paid through Legal Aid Ontario at the Duty Counsel rate.

Some of the women she sees have lawyers and are not pleased with them or do not understand what is going on. Sometimes she makes referrals to other lawyers. When women are in a situation where their relationship with a Legal Aid lawyer is not working anymore, she may advise a woman to let her lawyer fire her so that she can get someone else to represent her;

I tell them how to deal with their lawyers. They will ask me things they will not ask their lawyer because they are intimidated.

Feedback from women and from agencies indicates that this service is helpful because it's on-site. It deals with women's specific situations and information is kept confidential;

One reason I go on-site is that it's one less trip for these women. It's more on their turf or neutral turf than lawyers' turf.

The service provided encompasses more than straight legal information. The lawyer is aware of a lot of resources and makes whatever referrals might be most helpful;

The role of shelters is to empower women and not to rescue them, but some women are not taking in information well, and sometimes they need help to organize and prioritize. Sometimes this is a gap, yet sometimes women think the shelter has been wonderful.

The service hasn't worked well at the London Inter-community Health Centre because the women, most of whom are from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, do not show up;

It's not as easy for these women to ask for the help as for other women.

Sometimes what women need is not immediate legal advice, but the reassurance that they do not have to deal with the family law system while they are still in crisis;

It's helpful for them if I can say you don't have to do anything right now about custody and access. Save your emotional energy and deal with your immediate situation.

This lawyer will also help women to understand the process of obtaining a legal agreement for child support payments. She warns women, however, that;

Your child support is as good as the moment. If he works under the table or loses his job, your support will change.

This is a unique program that has not been replicated elsewhere. It has been carefully planned to address the significant gaps in service for women in the family law system. It has been informed by a sound knowledge of the dynamics of woman abuse. It deals with abused women empathetically and recognizes the significant structural barriers they face in the system. While it cannot make up for inadequate legal aid allocations and the difficult access to committed and qualified family law lawyers, it does offer women a significant degree of support in dealing with their legal situation when they separate from a controlling partner.

The Family Law Information Centre is a province-wide program operating in London as well as several other cities. The Centre is a three-way partnership between the Attorney General's office, Legal Aid Ontario and the Family Court in London. It offers the services of the three partners within the physical space of the court-house.

Although it is better resourced locally than in most other jurisdictions, there are difficulties;

Our region is in huge deficit. There is not enough money, even when the Centre opened, for a court person to work here.

The people who come in are referred by court staff, community agencies, police, women's centres or the phone book. The intake form elicits information about why people have come to FLIC. 25 to 30 percent of people require assistance in filling out the initial form.

FLIC offers a free information session, entitled "Couples Apart, Parents Forever," two nights each month. This is a two-hour session, facilitated by two mediators, that explains the emotional stages of family breakdown, coping skills and the effects of conflict. It explains choices available through the Alternative Resolution Officer. Sometimes a judge will order partners to attend.

The Mediation Service has a Mediation Referral Coordinator who is the first point of contact. She is part of a team that includes a social worker and Advice Counsel. She provides an outline of family law matters and she may interview someone to find out more about why they are there. She asks about woman abuse;

I ask the question. Often there is a look of relief that I have asked.

She gives general information on custody and access and information about finding a lawyer. If she has the time, she will go through the information with clients. The Mediation Referral Coordinator maintains information about a broad range of services and provides appropriate referrals to community agencies or to other court staff.

The role of Advise Counsel is different from Duty Counsel. This is a lawyer is associated with the program that can provide legal advice free of charge. Advice Counsel provides people with information about community resources and some understanding of how the legal system will view their particular circumstances. Advice Counsel does not form a client-solicitor relationship with those being advised.

There are people who don't qualify for legal aid, but who are not rich. This prepares them to use their lawyer.

Often people coming to FLIC need to see a lawyer. FLIC can refer people to a lawyer for confidential service, and a conflict of interest list is kept so that lawyers are only seeing one partner.

People can book mediations through this office. There is a screening process for readiness to mediate that assesses emotional readiness, capacity, mental health and addictions and power imbalances. The aim is to assess if these two people can sit down together and work out a fair agreement;

People need to give informed consent before they decide to enter into the process and there is a commitment to making it safe.

The program has done some thinking about safety planning;

There are two mediation locations, so staff is able to separate partners during screening. If the couple arrives together, they are separated. When abuse is identified, both on-site and off-site mediators have a conversation about safety planning with the woman.

FLIC staff explain their criteria for successful mediation;

Can both people articulate their needs, and do they feel entitled? A sense of entitlement for both parties is very important for a successful mediation.

On-site mediation is for anyone who is in court that day and wants to mediate short-term issues. If there is not time to work through these short-term issues, they may ask for an adjournment and come to off-site mediation.

There is no charge for this service. It encourages people to see if they can work things out and keep control of the process.

On-site mediation is a popular option for couples who are separating;

It is very rare not to try mediation. If it looks shaky, the mediator warns the couple that sometimes it works and sometimes not. Most people are willing to try. They have two options; the judge will decide or they will.

The off-site mediation service has a sliding scale fee that varies depending upon the number of dependents a couple has, as well as their income level. FLIC could not meet its financial commitments without collecting user fees. Fees may be waived and people receiving social assistance are never charged. The London office advocated for the right to waive fees.

Even if a couple has been in on-site mediation, they go through a one-hour assessment, which uses a standardized questionnaire and decision guide. Staff makes a decision about their appropriateness for mediation;

Sometimes there is some confusion that mediation is like counselling. Sometimes people going through mediation could really benefit from counselling support.

A couple is assigned to a mediator. The mediator sets up the schedule with them and they proceed. What they agree to is presented in a report. It is not finalized until they have seen a lawyer for legal advice.

We want to help people get as far down the road as possible before settling. Sometimes couples walk out and don't take the additional steps. It is not a binding agreement; it's a statement of good faith and intent. It is the individual's responsibility to make it binding.

A variety of other people may be part of this mediation process;

If the child has a children's lawyer, that lawyer or a social worker may be involved in mediation. People will not be given a children's lawyer after the fact. Sometimes lawyers may want to come or are asked to come. Ministers may come in. Several people have had advocates; everyone has to agree to that. For translators, we use Across Languages. A support person may not be in the room, but may wait outside of the room.

Off-site mediation occurs in mediators' private offices. Some safety in monitoring has been built in;

We make plans about leaving by the back door or front door. We have a camera system that monitors the front door, parking lot and back door.

FLIC staff emphasized the importance of legal systems working closely with other support systems;

There is not enough support for people. No matter how well-intentioned and no matter how well legal workers think they are meeting needs, people will say that their needs have not been fully met.

Advocates for abused women have long had concerns about abused women entering into mediation. They point out that the power imbalance in the relationship can carry over into the mediation process, resulting in women being further controlled or placed in danger. The staff at FLIC is less ready to dismiss mediation as an option for abused women;

Sometimes a woman comes in and says, 'I can't go to court and represent myself, I would prefer to do this.' A woman might say, 'I want to sit across the table and let him know that I can do this.' Sometimes she crumbles.

Shuttle mediation has been tried, but it is not very effective

In some instances, a person feels supported with a mediator present. They can say no when they otherwise wouldn't. This service is helpful because it links people back to community services. There is a danger in either/or thinking. It's not that we can make anything work. The key is that mediators are knowledgeable about woman abuse. Provincial standards for mediators are high.

They also acknowledge that;

The individual comfort level of mediators for dealing with situations with potential [power] imbalances differs.

Restricted access to legal aid and qualified family law lawyers may leave a woman with no option other than mediation. FLIC staff struggle with this reality;

We struggle with being a public program, with being accessible to everyone and safe to everyone and not furthering abuse. But when a woman has exceeded her legal aid hours and lawyers seem to say that this is your only option...

In those situations we try hard to see if there is a way to deliver the service and still meet these people's needs. They may try and find they can't do it, but we have tried. At every level people are told that this is a voluntary service. Anyone, at any point, can say, 'No, this isn't working.' It's very difficult to predict. There is no strength analysis instrument built into the risk assessment. What are the strengths that can be built upon? We need to build that into the instrumentation.

FLIC staff demonstrates an awareness and understanding of woman abuse. Where possible, they have adapted and modified processes to help ensure both identification of and safety for abused women. They are, however, working within restricted parameters. Although it was not designed to meet the needs of abused women, the FLIC program has made accommodations.

SERVICES UNDER STRESS

“This is what you get when you take away social supports and promote poverty. You get an overburdened system that runs from one crisis to the next without doing anything well.”

Abused women and their children, and even abusive men, are facing increasing degrees of stress in their lives. More people turn to helping agencies with complex problems. What effect does this have on the social service sector in general and the violence against women sector specifically? During a focus group, members of the LCCEWA were asked to discuss the obstacles they saw to reducing the number of children that go into the care of the Children’s Aid Society. Their responses demonstrate big picture thinking and, as a result, are as relevant to the violence against women sector as they are to the child protection sector. Representatives generated this list of obstacles;

- funding silos
- lack of political will
- attitude of policy makers
- fatigue and being overwhelmed
- no time to breathe and reflect
- sexism
- territorialism
- mother blaming/victim blaming
- disjointed and disconnected planning and delivery of services
- the way we make relationality invisible
- the ghettoization of women’s work in and out of the home
- lack of value and respect for those who are disenfranchised
- fragmentation and separation of issues
- if community (general public) is silent, no change will be made
- fear of reprisal for speaking out
- increasing corporatization and globalization of our society and our community

- what we count in the GNP, what's driving decisions, who holds power in our community and our world
- The lack of acknowledgement that the problem exists
- We don't always communicate effectively with those communities that can be mobilized within our communication networks

Respondents in this study identified five primary sources of pressure. Some, such as funding difficulties and staff workloads, are intricately related. Vicarious trauma is a constant in the work. A move to professionalize the delivery of service and training needs are two other themes that emerged and that are discussed in the subsequent section.

Funding

Respondents had a number of complaints about how their agencies are funded;

We're forced to follow ministry mandates, not the needs of women.

We live in a climate of cutbacks and fear for funding.

There is a general insecurity about funding.

We're expected to do more with the same.

We have to meet accountability demands, but we have no resources to support that work.

Funding modes lock us into delivering services, but it doesn't allow us to develop capacity in the community.

Diminishing and unstable core funding has moved agencies to apply for more grant funding. Respondents discussed some of the problematic aspects of this;

It's time consuming to write, monitor and report on grants. Small agencies are disadvantaged. They are challenged to come up with the resources to get grants. You need to collaborate for a successful grant. It takes time and travel money to develop collaborative relationships.

The requirements of the grant are often too onerous to justify the work it would take.

Grants fragment funding and can fragment service delivery, creating difficulties for women accessing services and agencies delivering services.

Funding may be restricted to specific agencies/sectors or women who use the criminal justice system and this may not match community preferences for organizing services.

When you need to chase grant money, it becomes the reason for existing, rather than the service being provided.

Our funding is so project-based, non-sustainable, how do you provide continuity? There is a huge gap in funding opportunities that does not acknowledge innovations that come from existing projects. You must have a new project to get new funding.

A respondent noted that smaller, less well resourced agencies are less likely to receive funding because;

Some agencies have the capacity for grant writing and fund-raising, and some do not.

Increasingly, grant writing is becoming an important skill in the violence against women movement.

As the demand for agencies to respond to more with less continues to grow, respondents see themselves reaching their limits;

I can't think of anything that we can do differently with what we have right now. It isn't about that anymore. I don't know where I can find more efficiencies.

We responded to 295 percent more domestic violence and family disputes between 1993 and 2003. I have a very good professional and dedicated staff, but it is at the expense of the workers who are stressed and tired. I need more money. I need a couple of more workers. We've had high caseloads in the past, and I have been able to negotiate a solution through an additional student or a volunteer, but this is beyond that.

In the face of these funding challenges, agencies have continued to face growing needs because they have done what one respondent urged;

Don't get stuck on having no money. Rely on vision and commitment.

Workloads

Respondents discussed the impact of working without sufficient resources, with increased workloads, more complexities and more administrative responsibilities;

Staff is stretched to the limit in this agency, and we see it in other service providers.

There are not enough perks in anti-violence agencies. It's the human stuff. We are all busy, expectations rise; we're not supposed to complain. Our own needs are not met. We need someone to say you are doing a good job and we appreciate it.

Workers are so burdened with cases that are getting more and more difficult. Liability increases. They have so much stress. They are more likely to make a mistake. They must get notes done and choose the right intervention. If they don't return a phone call from someone who is suicidal, there are big consequences. The stakes are so high.

Other respondents voiced concern about being able to maintain their quality of service;

The staff gets smaller with cutbacks. There is a smaller pool of expertise to draw upon.

Because money is restricted, we can't pay competitive salaries. I can't offer training to improve the skills and competencies of my employees.

Vicarious Trauma

Those who work with abused women and children face pain and violence. Sometimes they absorb this, resulting in vicarious trauma;

Child abuse is really the trigger and how the system treats people. What makes you angry is how the system screws people when it should help them.

Those who are going to feel the most vicarious trauma are compassionate people. The strength and ability to feel compassion is also a vulnerability to vicarious trauma.

There is still some resistance to acknowledging vicarious trauma;

There was an assumption in the past that we were above all that; we wouldn't suffer from that. Certain people challenged that assumption.

Some are aware of vicarious trauma and some not; those who work at this level, not so much. They have an intellectual understanding, but think, 'It doesn't happen to me.'

Many respondents discussed strategies for dealing with vicarious trauma;

There are lots of opportunities for peer consultation and debriefing, a lot of peer support around this stuff. We expect people to know how to ask for support. Being reminded of it regularly and being prompted to take care of ourselves as supporters is always important.

We get peer supervision and support as a way of dealing with it. We get three hours per month of peer supervision and support to problem-solve difficult and challenging situations. New policies and procedures to improve safety have come out of this.

There is some stroking that happens; that's good prevention. We have a Christmas party and a summer party, a yearly retreat focused on our own personal work and growth.

All staff members have the responsibility to have ongoing supervision. This is one of the best strategies for dealing with vicarious trauma.

We have an E.D. who listens; when you get overwhelmed, she will try to balance the caseload.

Balance helps with vicarious trauma. Balance helps and it is difficult in the anti-violence agency. One day a week with no client work is helpful. You need the freedom to do this. Maybe it's a leadership issue.

Worker Support

A respondent spoke of the difficulty of having people stay and work in these conditions and at the same time offered insight as to why they do;

Keeping good, experienced people in the system is difficult. There is a need for experience. We need to nurture these people and make sure that they stay with it so that we have a sense of history. Interpersonal relationships nurture people. We need to make an effort to know one another. If you have a problem, you have to have someone who you can call for advice and support. We also need good salaries; we need to be competitive.

Another respondent proposed recognition is one way to support anti-violence workers;

We need to recognize the work that people have done; we don't do this well.

And with all of the challenges one must face to work in the sector, why do people stay? One respondent posited that;

There is a self-selection process; those that can work in this environment are those that love it and stay.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF A MOVEMENT

“Professionalism may be a challenge, but the development of competence in a community is a good trend.”

Professionalization

Unquestionably, the violence against women sector has become more professional since its inception in the mid-70s. In the comments of respondents I uncovered both a dialogue and a debate around what we gain and what we lose in this shift.

Funders have helped to drive the move to professionalize. It is sometimes in response to imposed requirements that professionals are hired;

Some positions do have specific qualifications because they are Ministry-funded, primarily in programs licensed by day nurseries. Other than that, we have freedom to hire a strong multidisciplinary team without a lot of restrictions.

As Ministry of Health-funded providers, support counsellors are locked into professional designations. This is a particularly heated issue, as the College of Social Workers has become a designated professional body.

Unions too may have a hand in shaping job qualifications;

It is a unionized environment here. That means there is a very, very structured system. There are very clear qualifications for each position. We can't hire for education or experience unless it is specified in the job ad. Generally the level of education is an important determinant.

Respondents report that there is a mix of people, those who have entered the sector on their professional qualifications and those who have been trained through experience. Sometimes both count;

We hire Social Service Workers, Developmental Service Workers, Child and Youth Workers, and people with university degrees. Life experience weighs heavily.

We draw people from lots of different disciplines. It's important to keep examining what we do. If you only talk to people that agree with you, you don't develop your perspective.

Sometimes education is there, but we can also hire people with life experience, and this can prove to be extremely valuable when working with families. Women that come from situations of abuse and don't have the opportunity to get higher levels of education need support. Keeping a good mix of staff allows for a tone to be set in the entire agency. We are dealing with women on a level that does not emphasize the gaps between her education and that of the staff.

Understanding needs to come from working with people, not education. Education does not always allow for compassion and understanding and does not give the skills necessary to support those who are in crisis.

Some agencies are able to make choices about whether or not they need professionally trained people to perform the work;

Many positions don't require professional designations. For positions hired out of this office, experience is the most important qualification.

One of our clinical education programs uses foreign-trained health care workers and other professions to deliver a number of our programs and services from a lay health educator perspective. This allows us culturally appropriate outreach and services and also provides job experience to the volunteers.

Whether or not they see it as a positive trend, respondents agree that the delivery of violence against women services is being professionalized. Some felt that there were definite advantages in it;

On the pro side is liability coverage and accreditation. There is now another level of scrutiny.

I would like better trained counselling staff; feminists with formal social work qualifications.

Even those who embrace professionalization see some potential drawbacks;

The key is to make sure everyone is registered with the College of whatever profession they are in. Everyone from PhD psychology graduates to social service work program graduates is doing clinical work. More and more funding is tied to belonging to a College. The con of this is that good people get passed over.

A number of respondents expressed concerns about professionalization. Respondents saw professionalization as having a significant impact on the way services have developed, and they sometimes voiced concern that this trend is silencing and excluding those who have experience in the movement to end violence against women;

With professionalization, we get rigidity. Grass roots organizations are more flexible.

The original vision for Women's Community House was a safe house in every neighbourhood. It was never the vision of huge complexes with CEOs. We have turned it into a huge corporate response.

We had more creativity when it was more of a grass roots movement. Professionalization means that we create industry. It doesn't need to be an

either/or, but really we have lost something. I feel we are addressing the problem simply through providing shelters.

I think that there are people that need to write policy and others that need to work at the grass roots level. We need recognition within committees that those who want to do grass roots work are contributing as much as those who write policy. Sometimes it seems as if those folks are undervalued.

The biggest challenge is the lack of recognition for work being done and expertise that has been developed. We lack voice. We have some good solutions, but often we are not invited to the table. We are still seen as raging feminists that hate men.

It has reduced flexibility in terms of peer work and being able to hire outside of BSW and MSW qualifications.

Another concern that surfaced was that, in professionalizing the delivery of service, we are also bureaucratizing it. Respondents who spoke to this issue clearly described more complex bureaucracies as having a negative impact on our response to abused women and children;

The essence of the work is about building relationships. We need to treat people with respect and dignity. There is a push from the Ministry for more and more admin and less front line work. Social workers are delivering drive-through services. They spend more time approving documents and this limits the hours that can be spent with people. The focus of supervision has changed from clinical discussions about assisting people to ensuring Ministry regulations are being met.

We run our agencies as business and we have to, but we need some balance in that.

We don't spend enough time teaching people to talk to people.

We need to adhere to standards, but we can't let paperwork be the driving force. We need to see families and talk to children. We need to see the people we are helping.

Respondents identified both positive and negative effects of professionalization, but none denied it is a reality and one that is likely to continue. The central challenge of professionalizing the delivery of violence against women services and support is to recognize the experiential expertise upon which the movement was built and to continue to leave room in organizations and at decision making tables for this grass roots expertise and experience to be included. As VAW agencies face and respond to the challenges of professionalization, it will be helpful to recall the values upon which the movement was built and the impetus for creating services. One respondent reflected upon the importance of ensuring a sense of continuity in the work and in keeping discussions about feminism alive;

How are we bringing younger people into the work? We are bringing them into the work as professionals, not as caring members of the community. Maybe part of getting at this is having a discussion about feminism. We need intergenerational dialogues.

Training

The implicit assumption behind a move towards professionalizing service delivery to abused women is that this will improve service. It is important to examine that assumption. One way of doing that is to look at the education and training being provided to those who work with abused women. Respondents reported that a range of strategies was being employed to provide woman abuse training;

All staff receive training based on a feminist analysis of woman abuse. We also provide this to students and volunteers.

It differs with every officer; it depends on the background of each officer. I have taken courses on abused woman and sexual assault, but this wouldn't be true for all Community Service Officers. It's not mandatory for CSOs, but courses are available if you're interested.

If you become interested in specific areas, you can pursue training. There are opportunities to get professional development in this area, but it is not mandatory.

All staff have had the RUCS [Routine, Universal, Comprehensive Screening Protocol] training¹⁶. They all have current first aid, CPR, non-violent crisis prevention, diversity training. As a generic emergency shelter, we need a variety of skills.

Since '81, we have had ongoing training. We were amongst the first police service to have this kind of training.

I received formal training when I was first hired. There is a training facility in Hamilton that offered a course that touched on counselling and abuse. Now that's expanded. Now they take more time. There is a recognition that a lot of clients are dealing with woman abuse.

¹⁶ Middlesex-London declared woman abuse an urgent public health issue in the fall of 1999. Dr. Graham Pollett established a Task Force to develop a public health approach to woman abuse. Members of the health care, justice, community service and private service sectors agreed to participate and former Ontario Attorney General Marion Boyd was appointed as chair of the Task Force. The mandate of the Task Force was to examine the existing screening tools and protocols for woman abuse, to determine the required elements of an effective model and then to adopt a model to be used routinely and to be applied in a universal and comprehensive manner. In the RUCS model, all women over the age of 12 would be screened for any form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse occurring in childhood, adolescence or adulthood.

In Family Health Services, everyone gets the standard orientation on violence against women. In Healthy Babies, staff get additional training. In Family Planning and STD, they also do additional training.

The organization does not provide specific training or orientation on woman abuse to new staff members.

Clearly some organizations have taken the need to educate about woman abuse very seriously and have invested significant resources in doing so. But there remain organizations that work with abused women that have not done so. Whatever professional designation people working in these organizations have, they could benefit from specific education and training about woman abuse.

Ongoing professional development is also an effective way of building organizational competency and capacity. Again respondents reported a diversity of approaches for pursuing professional development;

We take a percentage of the budget for professional development. We ask staff to look for what they want and bring it forward. There is an expectation that when they come back, they will do a presentation and share materials. The rest of the staff get a briefing.

We look for free training, inexpensive opportunities.

Any training that is provided has to be donated. There is no money available in the budget.

There is not a lot of money for professional development, therefore we rely on project funding for new skill development.

We invite one of the [woman abuse] counsellors to lecture new residents once every six months. The counsellor that works on-site does the lecture.

We often send a staff member to become a trainer. There is some specialization and some opportunity to learn new things.

It is a sensible investment for funders to provide adequate allocations to organizations for the professional development of their staff. The violence against women sector will benefit from dialogue about what kind of training and professional development is most needed and an examination of current initiatives. Those planning, delivering and evaluating training and professional development opportunities need to pay careful attention to what is being taught to ensure that everyone who is working in the sector has a foundational knowledge of woman abuse and its effects. Feminist analyses that identify the broader social, economic and political forces that create the conditions for woman abuse to exist are very important components of training for all those who work in the sector.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STEPS FORWARD

“Our work is not about how to make the agency better, but how to make the community better. How do we create good community? Part of creating good community is having safety for everyone, not just women and kids. This goes to core issues like poverty, so the question is what creates human suffering?”

The Violence Against Women sector has met many challenges and has continued to find creative and innovative ways of working. Respondents reported many things they were proud of;

We are blessed with competent and compassionate leadership; this has led to an easing of tensions. We have had big changes in leadership. The strong foundations have allowed us to build. We went through a transition where there was anger and trying to tear things down. We are on the other side now.

Having agencies that deal with violence against women as a specialty helps. They have done pioneer work that has normalized the ability to talk about it. Having Changing Ways is amazing. They are doing good work. The anti-violence movement keeps violence in the spotlight. We have a good referral network. We have done some good coordination.

There is increased public awareness of woman abuse and sexual abuse. We need PSA announcements and more teaching in schools.

Hearing Pam Hannington talking on CBC about the need to talk to boys about sexual assault not being acceptable was good. We need to take the message to boys and to boys' parents. Ten years ago, she wouldn't have been on public radio. A space has opened for this discussion and dialogue.

It's not a private issue anymore.

A positive trend is that effective community responses have survived and we continue to create new ways of responding. Every movement has ebbs and flows, but the important thing is that the good stuff doesn't die.

The provincial government came out with standards on how to respond to domestic violence and criminal harassment, adequacy standards. That has been a catalyst for broadening the view and implementing important initiatives like the Domestic Violence Advisory Committee, the Domestic Abuse Coordinator, dedicated Crowns and the early intervention court process.

Investigations for woman abuse have changed. There is a lot more paper work, based on government directives. There is a Domestic Violence Protocol that has to be followed. In London, a Domestic Violence Coordinator oversees these investigations. He goes over cases and tries to get officers to broaden their perspective. It's a non-judgmental approach.

It was a local decision of the OPP to have a Domestic Violence Coordinator. It could become a regional policy, but right now is decided detachment by detachment.

The Strathroy-Caradoc Service took the initiative to designate a Domestic Violence Coordinator. My role is similar to London's Domestic Violence Coordinator.

The Prensa Latina has been running articles on violence against women every since the Multicultural Committee existed.

Transitional workers at the shelter are advocates for women. They provide extremely valuable outreach from Women's Community House for women who are not residents. We use that a lot. They are wonderful resources. It is so valuable to people. It's not just counselling and safety plans that they help with; it's housing and other resources, all the life skills, immigration issues.

Shelternet has had a big impact on the interpreters and translators who worked on it. Shelternet allows people to access information privately. It fills a big gap. Pamphlets are dangerous to carry around for some people.

There has been a tremendous acceptance that interpretation services are needed. London Health Sciences has a policy that every patient should receive service in the language of their choice.

The training on primary and secondary aggressors in Domestic Violence situations has been very good.

The Safe Schools Act, passed in 2000, has created an environment where there is some consistency in dealing with violence prevention. It has provided a framework. From a student's perspective, they do learn new skills, in terms of assisting a friend. They often say they are not quite sure how to prevent someone from being violent, but they can help someone find resources.

We did this project implementing the RUCS Protocol in the mental health sector because there was nothing in place and many women with psychiatric symptoms were really experiencing trauma and violence. We have eight partnered agencies. It's a two-year project funded by Trillium. There was a lot of resistance in the mental health and addictions communities to deal with woman abuse and a general lack of knowledge. It's taken a lot to bring everyone on board. Eight months into the project, we have trained one hundred and sixty workers. There is a research component attached to the program. It's astonishing how little workers knew. The Coordinator looks at cases and tries to help teams assess the potential for woman abuse situations, and it's still astonishing how little people are getting it. What's equally astonishing is how a few weeks after training, they were able to see things that they were not seeing previously; for example, recognizing that a

woman was being stalked. It's a real time of change. I have realized that we have to do a lot more training: for example, on how to do safety planning.

LAWC is now willing to send a counsellor out to a mental health agency. In mental health we go to people's homes. It's not always safe, or we might see a woman's worker going under a bridge to meet her. We need to get out of our offices, come up with some new and different ways to do this work.

Helplines are particularly helpful for women in rural areas. These include the Children's Helpline, the Parent Helpline, the Mental Health Helpline, the Legal Helpline and the Assaulted Women's Helpline.

Having the Public Health Nurse work in shelters has been a success. It was a well-designed program.

The reorganization of Legal Aid money into the Family Law Information Centre was a good initiative.

In assessment, we address woman abuse because of RUCS. If people aren't asked, they don't tell. I recall a young woman who seemed so well-adjusted. I asked the questions, and I would not have had the real assessment if I hadn't asked. When I started asking in the Family Planning Clinic, it was amazing, the disclosures. It wasn't part of the original history form.

When students come in for counselling in schools, we do ask the questions.

At Clarke Rd., a woman from the Health Unit was going in to talk to fathers about shaken baby syndrome. She had a football player shake a doll who was a model of a baby. Things have come a long way to be talking about these things in school.

High schools have had some good seminars. I have had girls tell me that 'A Love That Kills' was very good.

The improvements to the Domestic Violence Court and the expansion of the Victim Witness Assistant Program have been positive.

The new focus on community grants is positive. It shows that the justice system relies on the community for support and that we all have to be part of the solution.

There has been an expansion to utilize Across Languages in all of the West region. We can use Across Languages in Oxford and Elgin County.

Domestic Violence training for the police and Crowns has been an asset.

The general awareness of the needs of abused women and children, and abusive men, has grown. It's not such an uphill battle to get people to admit that it happens. Awareness improves the circumstances. Awareness makes it easier for organizations to have services better known. Awareness creates the climate for people to be more open, and when there is openness we can better deal with problems.

WORKING TOWARDS CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

“The feminist community is still grappling with the difficulties of embracing diversity. We need to stay away from divide and conquer techniques. There are different ways of seeing, understanding, interpreting and acting upon feminism.”

Respondents spoke about a variety of challenges organizations face in structuring services to become more diverse and inclusive;

There has been some serious floundering going on at the diversity level. There has been no growth in the sophistication of the work. Beyond the basics, decision makers should talk to agencies before they make a move.

There are more palatable barriers than what we call culture. Linguistic and cultural barriers are important, but we need to get over treating culture as a limiter. It’s not acceptable to assume everyone is like me, but we must assume that we can work with this person.

Challenges have presented themselves both in the coalition work of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and in the work of individual organizations. This respondent spoke of how participation in the LCCEWA has been restricted;

The LCCEWA has a history of doing good work, but in a way it has been exclusive. Maybe there has been a feeling that you will lose out by including those who do not think the same way as you. We need to learn more about how to work in coalition. The Coordinating Committee is about serving a community where people are different.

Another respondent speaks to the LCCEWA position;

You have to find common ground for people to come to the table. We are not asking people to give up their core values, just to be concerned about the safety of women and children.

A feminist analysis of woman abuse points out the fact of gender inequality and its devastating effects. It is an analysis that questions and challenges cultural norms of how power is distributed. Inevitably, it is an analysis that will meet with resistance. The work of coalition building requires compromise and searching for common ground. The LCCEWA has been enormously successful in marking common ground with the mainstream institutions of Canadian society. As Canadian society diversifies, the challenge is to continue seeking common ground with individuals and organizations new to Canada.

Diversity within Agencies and Institutions

Some respondents clearly identified barriers to diversifying their staff. They also had suggestions about how to begin to address these barriers;

We don't have an active policy; we have other rules for hiring, but we would not hire someone specifically to diversify the staff. Maybe we need to be more proactive in reaching out to diverse communities.

We need unbiased hiring practices and policies reflecting the community. The interview grid is not geared to recognizing the qualifications of people from other cultures. We need to adapt to recognize the experience and talents of culturally diverse people.

Being flexible about educational qualifications would reduce barriers for newcomers.

It's not a very diverse staff. We recognize that we are not doing well on that front, but we grow very slowly. The rate of change will be slow.

A respondent spoke to the importance of a comprehensive understanding of diversity that goes beyond language;

If we accept linguist diversity, we have to accept that service delivery models are flexible. In London, we do it better than many other areas, but we are still not perfect.

Other respondents described how organizations have included people from diverse backgrounds;

Yes, we have some staff with diverse backgrounds. We have done a diversity audit. We need to do some more outreach. Our executive director is into collaboration and partnerships. We need more diversity on the board. It really matters; when we have diverse staff, members of their community will come. Sometimes we do referrals for basic needs until they are able to begin counselling.

Two workers with diverse ethnic backgrounds do not have social work training, but their life experience is valued. The next hiring will be international to address the needs of the immigrant community.

We have diverse staff; Spanish, Ethiopian, Somali, Mandarin, French. We made a conscious effort to diversity. We are very well known amongst certain communities. We are one of the few shelters that will work with two-parent couples and children. That makes us more accessible to diverse communities.

This respondent spoke to some of the important benefits of having a diverse staff;

We get a positive response to staff from diverse communities. People like seeing people who look like them. It helps clients to open up. Staff from other cultures are highly skilled.

Barriers to Providing Service to Diverse Ethno-Cultural Communities

Organizations are recognizing the need to diversify their staff and to provide services to the diversity of communities that make up our society. Respondents discussed some of the challenges of this work;

We know that the multicultural community is not homogeneous. It is a huge community. I wonder if it is an issue of newcomers more than diversity. I think the largest problem is with the newcomers, wherever they come from. Diverse groups who have been here for a while gradually adopt the values of a new society.

Many newcomers are not used to services. They are not used to disclosing problems in the family.

Many are aware of services, but women see Women's Community House as a last resort. It's a cultural influence again. They will try to be a better wife. They have internalized the responsibility.

We don't get referrals. The system is not well designed for newcomers. We need to think about how to reorient services to help those people.

We are not seeing them come into the systems because we are not prepared for them. We don't see them and therefore don't recognize the problem.

Interpretation

Across Languages has been working with violence against women services for many years to provide ethical and confidential interpreting. Some institutions and agencies have been turning to them for help for years, while others are just discovering how useful they can be. In particular, London Health Sciences has been recognized for having a policy that every patient should receive service in the language of their choice.

Many agencies regularly employ interpreters, but funding for the service is sometimes a challenge. Some agencies are reimbursed for interpreting costs;

We use interpreters from Across Languages. They are paid for through Citizenship, to the A.G. The A.G. only pays semi-annually and we carry a huge bill for interpreters.

Across Languages is able to provide interpreting services free of charge for many organizations that serve abused women. If a woman who is accessing services is a victim of abuse and violence, but is not being served by a domestic violence agency, Across Languages will, nonetheless, waive their fee if the agency or professional dealing with her is prepared to report that the woman is being seen as a victim of domestic violence/abuse or sexual assault.

Across Languages is contributing significantly to the effort to provide services to abused women and is seeking matching a commitment when possible;

We cannot carry the entire weight of providing trained interpreters; some social will and institutional commitment is needed, too. We DO expect that public institutions, government, larger not-for profits and the private sector, in most cases, will allocate the resource to ensure they are providing access to their patients and clients. But even then, we make exceptions.....

As one respondent noted, the commitment may be there in principal, but not in practice;

There is a line item, but no extra funding for interpretation.

This leaves the responsibility for ensuring access to interpreters with Across Languages, who are working to meet the challenge;

In the fiscal year 2004 we provided more than 1000 hours of FREE interpreting service for women and men who were seen or served in the community. Rothholme and the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre are no longer charged for service, for example.... We can't open the floodgates, but we really can respond more often than we used to.

Providing access to interpreters is an important step in addressing barriers for people from diverse backgrounds, but as respondents remind us;

Interpreters are not the solution to access; they are just a part of the solution.

Language barriers are difficult. Even working through a translator can present challenges.

Respondents discussed some of the reasons why interpretation alone cannot provide equal access to service;

The use of interpreters can itself be a barrier, involving others before they are ready. This produces anxiety for women. Agencies are still not used to using interpreters and this poses a barrier.

There are barriers to access for providing service before an interpreter is called.

While interpreters may not always be the ideal way to deliver services, they will remain essential. Respondents saw multilingual services as being optimal, but spoke about how interpretation services can compliment them;

A community the size of London could use more services in other languages. We need more learning around a model that doesn't make culture a mystery. Barriers are not primarily cultural; they are communication barriers. Either we need service providers who speak other languages or quick access to interpretation.

Is it ideal for someone to communicate with a person in their own language? Yes! One of the conundrums is that as people from other cultures and those that speak more than one language are involved in providing service, access apparently increases, but is incomplete. We can never respond to the changing demographics quickly enough. We can't hire enough staff to cover all cultures.

Across Languages is an important bridge between violence against women services and diverse communities. Domestic violence training is provided to all interpreters whether they expect to do this work or not. This training is, in and of itself, a useful way to build community awareness and the capacity to respond to woman abuse.

Lessons of the Multicultural Committee

In 1992, the Multicultural Committee was formed as a subcommittee of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Now disbanded, this committee represented a significant effort to build bridges with a variety of culturally and ethnically diverse communities. Members of the committee got training from agencies, learned about their visions and missions and met staff, volunteers and clients. Project funding enabled the committee to hire a paid coordinator for two years, but much of the work was done by volunteers. In reflecting back upon this work, respondents named this as a difficulty;

There is a real resource issue to keep a structure together and coordinated and representative.

You need a coordinator for ongoing support. It would be easier for an agency to set up a multicultural committee and not just rely on volunteers. Then there is always someone there who can carry work forward. Our work was very hit and miss. We didn't have the organizational structure to hold regular meetings and send out notices. An agency could do that, provide support, but the multicultural committee was a floating committee, trying to avoid turf wars. But in this way, we were not taken seriously.

The challenges of this work went far beyond resource issues. Respondents who had participated in the Multicultural Committee spoke of being situated between the often-divergent views of women's anti-violence agencies and newcomer communities;

It is work that requires a lot of effort and a lot of thick skin. It was very difficult to present to agencies of the LCCEWA. There was fear; it was difficult to represent the views of conservative newcomers, to go and speak on behalf of these people or to defend the work that should be done with the agencies.

You have to do a certain amount of pussyfooting around. You cannot talk to a group at Wheable about woman abuse and not be laughed at or called a radical feminist. Many, many times when I spoke, even to friends, they did not want to get into it. How to change those sexist attitudes? It cost me friendships.

In summarizing the vision and mission of the Multicultural Committee, a respondent also identified a core challenge they faced;

We had a grass roots approach. We went to people in the community first. We tried to do outreach, to speak with people new to Canada. Those already tied into formal networks are easier to reach. We tried to speak with people who were very conservative and very religious outside of work hours. Sometimes it's more difficult to convince people like that than people who are already attending formal meetings.

Forging the Way; Working with Diverse Communities

Respondents presented important insights into the challenges inherent in efforts to facilitate communication and collaboration between the violence against women sector and people in diverse communities. At the same time, the need was clearly articulated;

We need culturally sensitive services for women new to Canada. You can't just provide the same services; you have to provide something different.

Respondents talked about how difficult it can be for individuals who get caught between conflicting value systems;

People in communities are torn between wanting cultural integration and wanting to maintain traditional ways.

I've been in London almost three years working on woman abuse issues and I have been really struggling. I am standing in the middle of two worlds.

It is very costly for those who make the effort, sometimes in broken English. Body language is very telling. People are not willing to ask questions when they feel they are not being heard.

It is essential not only to acknowledge that we are working with sometimes-conflicting value systems, but also to respect the right of others to have values that conflict with ours. This calls for respect in the face of disagreement. Openness and a willingness to learn and be flexible will be immeasurably helpful in promoting dialogue. A respondent provides a suggestion on how to begin doing this;

You have to be familiar with more than one culture. You get things from one culture and reconcile them with things from the other culture.

Respondents spoke of the need to bridge cultural values in order to reach women;

We need to build bridges. Everyone knows that you have to respect the law, but we need to build the bridge so that they are willing to disclose.

Newcomers need someone working with them patiently, helping them to learn, teaching them that feminism is looking for equal opportunities for women and not trying to undermine the family. Radical feminism is not the only way to go. We can afford to be more tolerant. We need to open dialogue and to drop judgment.

We need to figure out how to address tensions between feminists and cultural communities or we will continue to further isolate women in the communities.

Don't judge people when they make statements that reflect hierarchical values. Keep the issue of who you want to serve front and centre. You have to believe that they need your service. If they don't trust you, they will never come and women will get killed. You have to listen and be open.

A respondent noted how bridging cultural values could lead to designing services differently and why that's important;

Some women have gone to WCH. They are stigmatized and ostracized. If we had something in between that would create safety for abused woman...

Respondents offered many suggestions for initiatives that offered "something in between" or a continuum of choices to compliment existing services;

If we encourage women to open up about their experience of abuse within the family; to be empowered to bring up their problems and their abuse experiences within the community; for example, to go to the mosque and talk about this.

Develop early intervention services that would target abused women and men in general to educate them about the impact of abuse on the family and on the community. Have something at the mosque or the Islamic centre that can link into anti-violence agencies. Have an initial contact and referral. Have initial counselling; maybe enable agencies to send counsellors to this place to work collaboratively.

We need to work with the family unit and be more open to family interventions. If you try to extrapolate the woman and her problems then you will get denial and you will not be able to make referrals for her.

In the vast majority of cases of woman abuse occurring within the immigration process, couples are facing stress. Immigrant families and refugee claimant families lose their traditional roles and this is a major issue that leads to psychological abuse. Preventative measures could help. We could do programming targeting this group and dealing with these problems. We could frame it as support for new immigrant families.

Immigrants don't always understand that they can have some control over the choices they make. Family support can do a lot to alleviate woman abuse.

The ideal would be to have specific support groups for each culture. We need to incorporate an understanding of cultural beliefs, while respecting Canadian law. For this kind of woman, if we support her to learn English, support her to work; if we can support this woman economically, through work cooperatives or small businesses to get even a little bit of money, to get a sense of financial independence, that would help her to get more self esteem.

We could integrate some of the woman abuse perspective within existing programs in the community. If women are meeting weekly at the mosque, and occasionally they speak of problems, they may end up speaking of abuse problems in the family. They will end up speaking about problems they have.

Respondents pointed out that a diversity of approaches is needed and that we cannot assume that the needs of each community will be the same;

There is some common ground and there are some specific aspects for each culture. We are not sure about some of the questions. Do we need separate services or do we need an effective collaborative model?

There are some cultures that come with specific questions and only want help with that and prefer to rely on their own community for solutions.

The issue of self-determination is very complex. The best we can hope for is to be accepted in communities, to make services available and hope that they contact us.

Respondents also noted that the needs of women will differ. Some called attention to the specific vulnerability of women sponsored by their spouses;

I have seen women come to Canada who were sponsored by their partner and who end up on their own soon after arrival. They need very special services. Because they are sponsored, they may not have the same access to services.

Isolation produces gaps. There is a gap in our ability to reach immigrant women who have no status, have no access to welfare or other services.

Men that are abusive and that sponsor their spouses use this power to intimidate them. Sponsored immigrants are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Maybe Immigration Canada should provide them with specific information on Canadian laws. Women believe that their abusers have the power to deport them.

How Can We Develop Stronger Relationships with Culturally Diverse Communities?

Respondents identified a need for compromise in order to advance dialogue and communication. Part of that compromise may involve starting to work with the community as a whole, rather than with individual women;

Before we can work with abused women in newcomer communities, we have to work with the community as a whole. We have to build trust, open communication and we have to be prepared to compromise. This is the key element of any dialogue. We have different perspectives and different values and we need to get together and see where we can find common ground and try to expand that common ground and that way achieve our goals.

Cautioning against holding anyone specifically responsible for unwillingness to compromise, a respondent explained how everyone can contribute to an impasse in communication;

From my understanding and based on my experience, there are ideological barriers on both sides. On the community side, the family is sacrosanct and anything coming from the feminist perspective is targeting the family, and so now we all make sure to defend our families and our family values from the attack.

On the other hand, from the feminist perspective, we need not to emphasize the language aspects. The patriarchy enforces inequality in the name of the family, but if you really want to help women in communities new to Canada, you need to slow down the language. Just because you announce that there is support for women, you are not going to change history.

Respondents talked about a variety of ways to build bridges between the violence against women sector and people in culturally diverse communities;

We have other officers with contacts in other major communities. I sit on the London Urban Alliance.

I attended a weeklong Native Awareness Seminar taught by OPP officers in Espanola. I learned about traditional matters. If I take nothing else away, I take away the understanding that each community is different.

I talk about their psychological needs as immigrants. Family problems are often part of the immigration process. I let them know there is help, that problems can be resolved.

To have some women and men from the community working in woman abuse agencies helps. If an abused woman would go and find someone from the same culture who is a professional, she would be encouraged.

Resources are a key issue when you want to be inclusive. If you expect volunteers from the community to do all the work, it is going to be a challenge.

It's too heavy to do a workshop on what to do if your husband abuses you. Sometimes I see a couple and I take a few minutes alone with the wife.

Sometimes to call the authorities would damage the trust that has been built.

These people have their own perception of woman abuse issues. A lot of progress has been made. We want to encourage them to make more progress. We need to work with them. We need to use their influence. There must be some compromise, negotiation and dialogue.

Research has an important role in advancing the social agenda. It is key to working on bridging the gaps. We must be able to say that woman abuse is wrong and damaging based on scientific results. This takes it out of the forum of a polarized debate between feminists and the community and puts it in more neutral territory.

As one respondent concluded;

The most important message is that you have to have patience and empathy and remember that a certain sector of the community has to learn about woman abuse.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRES

“Another negative trend has been the idea that you can save money by not putting money into community level supports. This is a punitive approach, where you end up putting more dollars in at the failure end than the success end.”

Although they are often absent from the tables where violence against women is discussed, Community Centres offer a variety of supports to abused women. As one respondent said of the programs at a Community Centre;

All services relate in some way to abused women.

These Centres offer programming for women and their children. They provide parent-child programs. They organize community outings and meet people in informal ways. They may also meet with women on an individual basis for help with anything from toilet training to making connections in the community. Relationship building is an important part of the work of Community Centres. Respondents discussed this;

People are more trusting of staff here than those seen as ‘authorities.’ We are able to build relationships through interacting with people on a first name basis. It’s easy to connect with families through children’s programs.

When you work in the community, prevention is much easier than intervention. There is a lot of distrust for people who appear to be working for the government. It’s a lot of work to explain what a Community Centre is. We had to explain that we do not give personal information to the government.

One reason the programming is reaching abused women is;

The neighbourhood has a lot of affordable and subsidized housing and many women going back into the community after leaving an abusive relationship come here [to this neighbourhood].

One Centre lists a diverse array of activities;

We have a Well Baby and Well Child Clinic, some parent-child literacy programs, parenting groups, a drop-in for breakfast, a pre-school that requires registration, but not an intake process; we have three hundred and fifty kids in an after school program. We have a volunteer program. There is a Youth Worker that does recreational activities with teenagers. They have decorated their own space. The Youth Worker will do individual counselling as needed. We run a young moms’ group. We have beginning level ESL classes, a clothing exchange, baby food bank, employment centre and computers. We can help with other basic needs, emergency food kits, THAW, health access vouchers for something like Tylenol. We have a Family Support Worker who works one-on-one with women; many are single moms. Many have relationship issues; most have OW problems,

furniture problems. We have a collective kitchen and groups for women and senior women. We provide information and referral.

Another respondent described programs that reach out to women who experience abuse, as well as others, to break through their isolation;

We are reaching out to residents that are highly isolated. We asked the women what they wanted. They wanted some place to meet and talk about their experiences. We were able to get space from a program that is already operating. And so we started a program for senior newcomers. It has been running for a year and a half. We meet every Monday and Thursday from five to seven. Some women just want to practice English. Some bring letters for translation. Some have been abused by family members. One has been placed in Second Stage Housing. When you talk with them, they open up and you find there is a lot of control and neglect. This group is getting a lot of help from the community. There are a lot of retired seniors, those from the London Literacy network, who help. Sometimes they provide one to one support and sometimes in groups. They deal with all issues. They have so much to talk about, for what they have been through. Some now are saying they want to help. The next initiative will be intergenerational support. We will set up a coffee time to share time and support. They now want to give something to the community. This is a big part of it.

Friday, we have space in the gym and the kitchen for two hours. We announced that we would have a Friday Soup. We asked the residents to come and meet and welcome those with mental illness and have soup with them. This was a very difficult group to bring together, but I have lived in this community a long time and I know people. I was able to approach families and ask them how to bring people together. They also wanted a place for them. We were able to do something for them. Now they feel this is their home. We intentionally invite people who live in the same buildings. Now they visit each other. This has been a very, very successful program. This program has changed to provide a meal, a very good meal. Every week a different meal is served. The women who are being supported want a chance to volunteer. We are able to connect those with mental illness with others who are isolated. We have between twenty and fifty people coming every week for this program. Residents pay two dollars for a meal, which might be a quarter chicken, potatoes, salad, bread, dessert and coffee. This way, those with mental illness get the support they need. Some of them volunteer now. It's a very successful program, but we only have these two hours for programming. But we have opened the possibility of coming here [to the Community Centre] anytime for them.

We started the Stop and Shop group for seniors and for those with transportation problems. We get volunteers to drive those who need rides to get where they need to go. My assistant and I also drive. We try to look after whatever needs arise. It is very important that they be active and we don't want to suppress their desire to get out. Stop and Shop supports the rest of the programs. We see a lot of needs,

especially in regards to food. It is there for them, but they can't reach it. If they take public transportation, they still have to walk a long way. We help them get to the food bank. We make regular trips twice a month. They couldn't go before and even if they got there, they couldn't carry the food. Their incomes are very low. I talk to churches and to mosques and gather gifts for them. I had to change my small car and I bought a van. You have to love the people you work with. Even my assistant bought a van. The residents who have a car put two or three in a car. If any organization could make a donation, a van is needed.

The Community Centre can also work collaboratively to share space, especially if they are compensated for it;

The Community Centre is not a treatment centre, but we can make space available to others. But this costs the Community Centre, and we don't always have the resources to provide space for other programs. The Community Centre is a very cost-effective model.

A respondent described his philosophy of working with women who have been isolated in programs at a Community Centre;

I consider the women I work with as full entities. I don't just look at domestic violence; I look at their entire lives. I am not a specialist. If any part of their life is not okay, it affects the rest. For many of them, life has been overwhelming. Now that they are no longer isolated, they are identifying their skills. Some need help with tutoring for their children. I make sure she gets the help that she needs. Some have housing issues, issues related to a source of income, immigration issues. They get nowhere with no help. I try to help them in any way we can. We don't say this is not our job.

He goes on to describe how women respond to this;

Now the women themselves have started to raise funds. They go on trips; they do many, many things. They are the ones that take charge of their programs. We have some cooking programs. We have programs that are working without funds. When they have guests, they have tri-lingual interpretation. This is all volunteer. It's hard, but the good thing is that the women insist now on getting what they need.

The City of London can support this kind of programming, and a respondent voiced hope that they will;

I hope that new plan for South London Community Centre will provide more resources for this program. The women attended focus groups to give their input into the process.

A respondent was eloquent in summarizing a Community Centre's work with isolated people;

This work is addressing the violence of social isolation and Post-Traumatic Stress. It is a community development approach that builds trust, builds relationships. It teaches people to identify their problems and the sources of their problems and what they can begin to do about them. It brings people together and offers them a chance to give to the community, as well as to receive from the community.

WORKING TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

“The funding climate and the silo funding structure have often set us up against each other. But the climate is changing, as was reflected in the LCCEWA Visioning Day. Relationships are stronger. This is also reflected in our leadership.”

Both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse exist to promote better collaboration between organizations that work with abused women and children and abusive men. They understand the value of good communication and cooperation and they spend considerable time and expend considerable resources attempting to improve that. They do face obstacles, and respondents discussed them;

Funding fragmentation and specific mandates can challenge our ability to collaborate.

There is little flexibility around funding mandates. HRSDC funds employment training, but don't want to recognize that needs are more fluid. There is a compartmentalization of service delivery.

Some services are very well connected and others are not as well connected. We could all use help in communication and collaboration. The larger gaps are between rural and urban service providers. In London, there is good will and good intention to provide seamless networking.

Services are reasonably well coordinated, but we need fluidity. We need to encourage discussion about what services can handle. Women with high-risk safety concerns are not appropriate for us.

We had to narrow down our involvement in outside committees. We were stretched too far.

The demand for service is so high that communication suffers. The simplest thing is the most difficult; to pick up the phone and ask, rather than getting caught up in assumptions.

Sometimes there is a refusal to refer from one agency to another. There is a lack of support for a program, a philosophical disagreement about funding for that programming.

Coordination is good amongst those services that exist, but there could be better coordination between the two coordinating committees.

Improve Coordination? Absolutely. VICCERS and Family Consultants overlap in the type of service they provide. There is very little communication. We have three police services that are not consistent in their approaches, though some attempts are being made.

In their red flag report, the Domestic Violence Advisory Committee has a list of concerns about the lack of coordination for justice services.

The way Support Link has been implemented has fragmented service and created problems, especially for women in rural areas. In rural culture, women link up with a service provider and they stay with that service provider. They won't go to multiple appointments. The service should be linked to the counselling and support services that women already use; in the county that is the Women's Rural Resource Centre. This service provides psycho-educational supports that allow her to make changes and then do safety planning. Having an emergency cell phone is a logical extension of these supports.

Because of recent problem with Middlesex County Victim Services, the Advisory Committee for Support Link didn't meet from May until September. What was happening to the women with the cell phone during that time? Shelters have more infrastructure. Even if there was a serious problem, work would be picked up by other staff and would continue.

Obviously, there is work to be done on this front. Policy makers and funding bodies are often responsible for the way work and responsibilities are divided. If improvements are to be made, it is essential that decision makers consult with those who are delivering service.

A discussion of these difficulties and challenges should not obscure the many collaborative initiatives that are taking place. Respondents described a multitude of creative partnerships that are at work in our community. This is not an exhaustive list, but, rather, a sampling of the ways that we are working together;

Coordination takes place through standing committees, ad hoc committees, planned events and activities and through relationships. The LCCEWA, MCCEWA, St. Joseph's Advisory Committee, the Family Consultant Advisory Committee, the Family Court Clinic Child Witness Advisory Committee, the Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee are all examples of forums for inter-agency communication and consultation.

The Strathroy Rural Resource Centre uses an office for counselling. The Middlesex Health Unit uses a room here for meetings and research. The boardroom is open to the community in the evenings. We try to make it the focal point of the community.

Heartspace has eighteen partners from the Violence Against Women sector, mental health, children's services, Children's Aid Society, Merrymount, Childreach, other addiction services and a variety of other social services like LEADS, the AIDS Committee of London, the Public Health Unit, hospitals, the legal sector, probation and parole.

At Heartspace we have a duty to report, and many women are already CAS-involved or in the early stages. CAS is a collaborative partner and the major source of referrals. We try to first and foremost make sure children are safe. We ask mom who her support resources are. We may place her children at Merrymount. We can assist getting children to Merrymount and mom to detox. We would have a duty to report; then work cooperatively with CAS. If there is woman abuse, we would strongly urge her to use VAW services. Transition workers from Women's Community House come here. If the safety issue is around mental health, we would use the Mental Health Crisis Service.

Women want to work with the Women's Contact Coordinator [at Changing Ways.] It's a way to transition to other agencies. I'm working with the Health Unit on the 'On Track' groups. I'm working with LAWC to develop a group combining material from the two agencies.

Changing Ways has shared a Volunteer Coordinator with Merrymount for three and a half years now. It has worked well, and provides benefits and full time work for staff.

The dads' groups have been a large collaborative effort. There's a men's group in Boston, Emerge, which is piloting a men's group in Toronto. Counterpoint and Merrymount are also piloting one.

Workers from different agencies come in. The Youth Action Centre worker comes in. A nurse from Intercommunity Health comes in once a week. A public health nurse comes once a week for a meeting with moms, babies and pregnant women. It's part of the infant high-risk assessment project. Another community mental health worker from Mission Services does groups and crafts, and haircuts. John Howard comes in for youth, for support and help in finding housing. A psychiatrist comes in once a week.

There is a committee of the five HRSDC-funded centres that meets regularly. That is a forum that is used to coordinate ideas, not a funded body. There is the possibility of coordinating initiatives there, although it's not a woman abuse committee.

I sit on a service providers' network that consists of local service providers. We work a lot with school communities. We're getting ready to plan a fair at the Strathroy high school.

The Senior Project meets monthly at the London Police Station. They bring problems regarding pensions, etc to representatives of organizations like HRSDC. The representatives bring back information to the seniors.

When London Police check a domestic violence or family violence category [in their reports,] Family Consultants do a computer search and make contact to offer a referral or follow-up.

We have a tiered response. We have safety nets. If it's a criminal charge, then we refer to Victim-Witness. If it involves a child, then Family Court Clinic is called. The offer of help is made at several points.

We have a child advocate on staff that works for Women's Community House and Merrymount.

Heartspace shares a play therapist that with Merrymount.

The School Board has worked with the Centre for Research through the 4th R project.

A grant from the Ministry of Education goes to shelters for a school-based project; Women's Community House and shelters in Woodstock and St. Thomas. These partners educate administrators and teachers on the protocol and how to support children who are witnessing [woman abuse].

The Dream Catcher Project was for First Nations women with mental health issues. The Canadian Mental Health Association and Success Resources were involved in a mental health project for people of different cultures.

SEARCH has a twice-yearly networking lunch that we attend to keep abreast.

I sit on a Parkhill Committee to organize the Wellness Fair.

[Dr.] Susan Rodger has a project to build a supportive learning environment for abused women.

The Hadley and Jordan Hiencamp Inquests have made a difference. As a result of the outcomes of those processes the Public Health Unit sees any baby under two in a shelter. The child is identified and there is a check-list. These initiatives were in response to feedback that has been received. We make mistakes when we don't listen to what people are saying. We need to act with them to create responses.

The Children's Aid Society group treatment program has twenty-odd partners; Women's Community House, London Abused Women's Centre, Victim-Witness, WAYS, Women's Rural Resource Centre, Craigwood Youth Services and many others.

The Shelter has set up a pet program with the Humane Society.

There is a new diversion program for youth. Instead of processing them through the criminal justice system, we are making alternatives available.

CAS has a Native Services Team to work with all cases on the reserves. We try to establish relationships with band leaders. There is monthly review of cases, where clients are on reserve. Staff here have to get a supervisor here to sign off on their work, and most work is done with a band rep. A new staff member, who is native, has been out to the reserve. That has made a marked difference in the response on reserve. Now we are getting calls from the reserve wanting to run something by her.

There is a new training team that is specializing in cultural diversity. Cases would go to that team. There will be ongoing training for that team, using community resources.

The staff of Across Languages will use the services of a counsellor at the Interfaith Counselling Centre if they are traumatized.

THE RURAL CONTEXT

“The difficulties are more severe here than in London; there are always less options. Services have less money and less staff. For women, contact with others is very difficult. It’s hard to see past barriers of transportation and isolation, so women are shadowed by a sense of desperation.”

Values and Attitudes

Respondents often noted that rural culture adheres to more traditional family values;

There are more traditional gender roles and there is more stigma attached to disclosing. Outlying communities are more conservative.

Women face attitudes that you must stay in your relationship and that the man is the head of the household. They need to overcome the fear that someone might find out, in order to be willing to share the secret of their abuse with someone who can help.

Respondents saw that young women continue to struggle with abuse;

A lot of young women in the county, who are in abusive relations, have abusive fathers, and their boyfriends are just like their dads.

The idea that relationships are not abusive unless there is physical violence is still very prevalent. Even young women often say, ‘If he doesn’t hit me, it’s not abuse.’

They are not getting good education on this issue. Schools are trying, but it’s not entirely their responsibility.

Still the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships are complex;

Some women are now very active in the farm business and are in a partnership with the abuser. They don’t want to leave the business. The other reason is pressure, the pressure to resolve it and go back, with people telling you, ‘You can’t carry on like this.’

The role of the church was discussed in the shaping of rural culture. When the question “Does church play a bigger role in the rural area?” was posed, there was agreement that the role of church has changed and that it’s an aging population that continues to be faithful churchgoers. It was pointed out that there are people who hold positions of power in religious organizations who do counsel women to stay in abusive relationships. At the same time, a note of caution was voiced, and we were reminded that a religion or spirituality that is responsible for promoting abuse is a bastardization of religion and spirituality.

Truly, religious people would not respond this way. They would keep the responsibility on the abuser.

Like the role of the church, attitudes towards women are evolving in rural communities. A respondent noted;

I'm in my fifties, and my generation was never encouraged to get drivers' licenses. Thirty years ago that wasn't something you wanted to have. This, of course, meant that there was not a readily available escape route. It was an event to go into town.

This generation of women was not encouraged to work outside of the farm, but their children's generation has been more actively involved in community, and they have more independence. Some boundaries for leaving have been alleviated with the younger generation.

Still, respondents counselled care and balance in approaching rural communities;

One of the difficulties is that you have to balance what can be radical feminism with the way of thinking in rural areas. There is a culture that tolerates more abuse than we are used to. There is less opportunity to address problems of woman abuse openly in small rural communities. There is more of a sense in the rural areas that family problems belong in the family.

You can't move faster than they are willing to move. You have to be sensitive to community values and choose your battles wisely. Change is not going to come within a month of being out there. You can make changes, but if you move too fast, people won't be ready for them.

One respondent spoke powerfully of how we need to consider the root causes of woman abuse and of the varied options open to us;

Although we are focused on woman abuse, we are really talking about a societal issue; men, woman and children are all wrapped up in this. It's about how we value women, how men value women and how we educate our children. We need to keep everyone involved. It's a big picture. How do we help children to develop healthy attitudes towards women? How do we help women to develop agency and confidence? How do we help men who are and who are not supportive of partners.

It's a very complex picture and we can go in many different directions and be effective.

One respondent provided a summary of the attitude changes she would like to see;

I would like a more caring general population, intervening instead of minding their own business. Knowing that people will not tolerate it would be helpful. Education is needed. Attitudes towards women are still very misogynous. Neighbours often look the other way.

We are still dealing with a closed mentality, and that is a greater barrier to helping women than the lack of services.

Levels of Service

Respondents acknowledged that women in the county have a much harder time accessing services than those in London. Some acknowledged that they cannot offer the same range of services in Middlesex County as they do in London. Others noted that they provide the same range of services, but not the same depth;

Individual counselling, outreach and preventative education are all areas of service that are more limited in the county than in London.

Even given the problems in the city, it's worse here. It's an uphill battle.

Strathroy is the largest urban centre in the county outside of London and you would expect that professional community of legal, medical and counselling services would be linked in such a way to ensure a basic level of services. But this is not always the case, and the shelter (Women's Rural Resource Centre) spends a lot of time getting women to London to see lawyers that accept legal aid. And sometimes we are dealing with medical issues that may have been neglected for a long time. It means incurring costs in terms of accessing transportation and for childcare.

A lot of women in the Strathroy shelter are from London, but they can't get back to London for programs and appointments because there is no transportation. This increases their isolation.

Sometimes limitations are dictated by funders;

In Parkhill, we can see anyone because we have funding pots, but in other areas of the county, Glencoe, Lucan, Dorchester, and Strathroy, we can only provide services to people on EI or OW and there are no group supports.

Funding formulas contribute to the problem because;

There is an assumption that it costs the same to deliver services in the city and the county, but in fact it costs more to work in the county.

Each community has a different mix of funding and services. A lot of services in Middlesex County are primarily related to the five employment resource centres funded by HRSDC.

The scarcity of group supports was often mentioned;

Groups in the county are not regularly scheduled. They are scheduled on an as-needed basis, and often a situation arises where two or three individuals need a group, but a minimum of eight is required to start a group.

This problem is compounded by a lack of safe space, where confidentiality can be preserved during group sessions. Women are often very resistant to participating in groups because they are concerned about who else will be there;

We have seen many odd situations where women in groups do know each other. Women will come into group and say, 'Oh, she did my insurance' or 'Our daughters go to ballet together.' These dynamics make it very difficult to preserve confidentiality for women.

The Mutual Aid Program for Parents (MAP) can't find space consistently in Glencoe or Strathroy.

Groups for children pose similar challenges and respondents described situations that would never arise in London, with biological children and foster children who know each other participating in the same group. Despite these challenges respondents did report that when women and children do have an opportunity to participate in groups, they gain a lot from them.

Both men and women are often obliged to come to London for service. Preventative programs, various rehabilitative groups and basic education for substance abuse, anger management and anti-criminal thinking were all mentioned as only being available in London. Respondents listed other services not available in the county;

There is not a childcare service like Merrymount in Middlesex County.

Most employment support services, including assessment, job training and retraining, are only offered in London.

LEADS Employment Service will work with women who have experienced women abuse, but generally only women who have been referred by the shelter or another agency would know this.

Outside of Strathroy, there are no shelters and very restricted access to food banks. There is a food bank in Ailsa Craig.

Some services based in Strathroy are intended to be available to other areas of the county, but transportation remains a problem.

Even if a counsellor is there for a half-day, it's still twenty-five kilometres away and she can't get to the service.

As one frustrated respondent explained;

A lot of referrals don't work out in the county. If you think about services abused women need, it makes sense to take it to them.

Efforts are being made to take services farther out into the county. The Northwest Middlesex Multi-Service Centre notes that demand is increasing;

In the past a lot of outreach was needed. Now younger women thirteen-, fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, are asking for service. The school is more receptive to doing education. Some services have been spending a day or two a week working in the county, and more are beginning to do this.

Others see a less rosy picture. A respondent stated that there are waiting-lists for all services, that only short-term service is available and that this can lead to feelings of hopelessness;

Stress levels increase and violence increases. Hopelessness is the key to this cycle.

Under Serviced Areas

Strathroy is one thing, but rest of county is very isolated.

This was a commonly expressed sentiment. There are certain pockets in county where people are struggling. Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Lucan, Glencoe, Mount Brydes, Melborne, Poplar Hill, Thedford, Arcona, Watford, Wardsville and Newbury were all named as areas that are under-serviced;

As you head towards Glencoe and Newbury, there are smaller populations and fewer services. Providing a cost-effective service to address the needs in these areas is a challenge that has still to be met.

For those dealing with abusive relationships in the county, specialized services are even farther away and even more expensive to access.

Several respondents noted that existing relationships in the county are strong and communication is good, and that this can help to mitigate the dearth of service. Some new efforts are being made to reach the more isolated areas of the county.

Glencoe has an outreach worker from the shelter.

Family Service London is now at GAINS Centre in Strathroy and is going to Glencoe and Parkhill. This is a significant development that has been funded by the Middlesex County Ontario Works initiative.

Transportation

“Woe betide you if you don’t have a car” is perhaps the most concise description of transportation problems in Middlesex County. Women who have experienced violence and service providers were unanimous in their judgment that mobility and transportation issues are an almost overwhelming challenge;

There are still a number of women who do not have a driver’s license. For other women, there’s not a vehicle and no access to one. In Strathroy transportation is a problem if women don’t have bus money or another means of transportation.

For women who live outside of Strathroy, the problems intensify;

Women from outlying areas may be able to access service in Strathroy in a crisis or on occasion, but they go back to their community, and they still have no transportation and no access to service they need.

Many women are tied to the farm and not able to leave. A woman says, ‘I’m getting out of here; I’m going.’ She gets to the end of the lane, but where is she going to go? Transportation is a huge ongoing issue and it can freeze women.

Some women would prefer to come to London for confidentiality reasons. For those without transportation, getting into London is a problem, leaving them with restricted options or, sometimes, no options at all. These problems with transportation pose the risk of stigmatizing small and rural communities in Middlesex County;

Girls who are sexually assaulted in the county have problems with transportation. They can’t get to services on their own. There is a lot of victim-blaming and they may not want to disclose to their parents.

Transportation is an issue for any youth and for single parents.

It is difficult for men to get to Changing Ways for the early intervention program. Probation officers also face this barrier. They can’t get to every small community, and with no transportation and no money for transportation, it is difficult to mandate counselling.

Transportation to the Sexual Assault Care and Treatment Centre at St. Joseph’s Hospital is often a problem for women outside of London. There was a suggestion that a fund for transportation could be established to pay for taxis for women. It would also be helpful to decide what police service has responsibility for transportation when a woman is willing to go with police.

For the most part, each agency is trying to deal with its transportation problems in isolation and is using internal resources when they are available. Because the Children's Aid Society works with children, they have had to provide transportation to their Community Group Treatment Program. Their experience helps to illustrate some of the challenges, which are not just financial. They have volunteer drivers for the city, but not for the county. In the county, they have liaised with bus companies and have used a mini-bus for picking up kids. They were professionals in transporting kids and this arrangement worked well. They also use taxis;

We want drivers to be sensitive to situations of children. Confidentiality is a huge issue with cab companies. Safety is also an issue with cab companies, as they don't always understand that they can't just drop kids off. Transportation for clients in Middlesex County remains an ongoing challenge.

Respondents discussed options for improving transportation for abused women in the interviews. The ideas call for cooperation and collaboration;

What if eighteen agencies were to give up \$2,000.00 to do some coordination of driving?

The idea of having a coordinating service offering free and confidential transportation and childcare for clients of all social service agencies was raised. It could function with a network of volunteer drivers, who are reimbursed only for their costs. It would require a central number to call in order to arrange for a ride and childcare if needed. This sort of solution calls for funding in order to sustain it.

Volunteer drivers would need training on woman abuse, on the importance of confidentiality for clients and, depending on the situations in which they would be used, perhaps on how to deal with crisis and people in distress. This model raises liability concerns that would need to be worked out;

If volunteer drivers were to be used, it would make sense to work with CAS on training since they already do it. Volunteer drivers enjoy their work and sometimes they work much better than cabs because often the same driver is used and it's possible to build a relationship. On the other hand, it may be difficult for someone who has been assaulted to go with a volunteer driver. Their sense of personal safety might be compromised.

Other ideas included making funds available to women so that they can access buses or cabs to get to services or providing funds to the staff of agencies so that they can meet women in safe places that are also accessible to the women they are seeing.

All respondents in the county mentioned that they would like to see safe transportation. Respondents concurred that currently no one has sufficient money in their budget to cover transportation needs and that it is often very difficult for women to come in to access service;

Many women have to travel far for services.

On the day of court Police can assist, but this is not an appropriate use of resources.

In a perfect world, we would have free transportation for everyone. Agencies would save many hours trying to problem solve who will pay for clients transportation, how to cost share it.

Transportation Committee

A transportation committee to address transportation issues in Strathroy and surrounding communities, called “The Driving Force,” was set up in 2001. It is looking at models in other counties to see if something can be set up in Middlesex. It received funding from HRSDC and COMSOC. A Research Coordinator was hired in 2003 until the end of March 2004. The next plan is to hire a Project Coordinator and continue to have more community forums.

When a service is established, initially it will be for HRSDC clients only. It may be possible to expand that mandate at a later time. Some ideas under discussion to address the transportation issue are;

- Ride-sharing, car-pooling or volunteer drivers; initiatives that would be advertised in workplaces;
- A shuttle service for Strathroy; a shuttle service between Strathroy, Mt. Brydges and Glencoe, may also include a shuttle into London. This idea came out of a community survey;
- A car coop concept, allowing people access to vehicles when they needed them, supported by agencies pooling their resources.

These ideas will now go forward to the committee to decide which ones will be pursued. The Committee is trying to obtain funding for Phase 2, which would involve hiring the Project Coordinator and implementing some of these ideas.

The existence of this committee highlights the lack of transportation in the county and the barriers that poses for people. Although the ideas that have been formulated may help those seeking employment if they are implemented, they will do nothing to address the need for women and children who experience violence or for men who are abusive to obtain service. The lack of transportation remains a significant barrier to accessing services in Middlesex County and there is no sign that this problem will be dealt with in the near future.

Policing and the Justice System

In principle, residents of Middlesex County have the same access to policing and justice services as those in London. At least one police representative felt that there is no difference in access to service for policing;

The Ministry of the Attorney General is mandated to prosecute anyone who is charged with a criminal offence and, in terms of services to victims, the same mandate exists in the county as in London.

In practice, there are differences, beginning with victims of crime. The Victim Witness Assistance Program doesn't have branches in county. If a woman can't make it in to London, she may have to rely on someone with less skill and less experience to help her. In the county, it can be a challenge to find support services for an abused woman in order for her to serve as a witness. Providing more money for women's services so that they can support a woman to be a more willing and participatory victim in the criminal prosecution would be a helpful strategy.

Transportation is again named as the major barrier for women in the county needing to access the Victim Witness Assistance Program. There are no funds allocated to assisting someone from county to get to the London office. Sometimes that means having to do work over the phone and this can impede the development of a good relationship.

A lack of childcare when meetings are scheduled with Victim Witness Assistance staff and on the day of court was also named as a significant impediment for women who participate in criminal prosecutions as witnesses.

Men who abuse women also experience a lack of service in the county with detrimental effects;

As part of his bail conditions, a man charged with abusing his partner will have forty-eight hours to contact Changing Ways and get into a group. If he doesn't have transportation, he can't come to group, and Changing Ways will be obliged to report that to the police. He ends up back in jail. If he is successful in meeting all of his conditions, he can get a conditional discharge and he will not have a criminal record.

One respondent pointed out that Changing Ways will go to Strathroy, but not Delaware, Lucan, Alisa Craig, Parkhill, Mount Brygdes or Ilderton.

Changing Ways does not run groups regularly in Strathroy because of the difficulty of having a sufficient number of men ready to participate in a group at the same time.

A police officer reported that if a man is willing to leave the house when a domestic dispute occurs, it is difficult for police to get him a place to stay in Strathroy. Several respondents expressed concern that charges are not being laid as often as they should be in cases of woman abuse in Strathroy. Women reiterated this fact in the stories they told in the rural women's focus group.

New policing models are evolving to serve the needs of the rural areas of Middlesex County. There was a local decision to have an OPP Domestic Violence Coordinator in Middlesex County.

This could become a regional policy, but right now the decision to have such a position is made detachment by detachment. The Domestic Violence Coordinator position has been filled for two years and is the only one in the province. The Coordinator is on-call around the clock. Once a charge has been made, she takes over the investigation. She develops a relationship with the woman. She takes a victim statement, provides referrals and ongoing contact with OPP and monitors court paperwork. She is able to provide consistency for court preparation and Crown briefs and this leads to enhanced investigation. She also sits on committees that deal with the problem of violence against women. The position is seen as a model for this kind of work. It was created because a gap for victims of crime was identified.

The downside of it is that other officers don't learn how to deal well with domestic situations. Efforts are being made to develop this expertise in other officers, beginning with one on each platoon.

One respondent noted the need for this, identifying;

... a need for training around sexual assault and woman abuse issues and how to make effective referrals to anti-violence agencies for OPP officers.

Another respondent provided an example of why it is important for all officers to have an understanding of woman abuse;

A woman went to the police about stalking. An officer told her, 'You need to get a lawyer and deal with this through a separation agreement. You don't want the police involved in this.' Who the hell are they working for?

To balance concerns about inconsistency in police response in rural Middlesex County, some respondents noted that when charges are laid, women get very good service. Usually a single officer is able to handle her case from start to finish, permitting her to establish a rapport with the officer, facilitating communication and offering better access to information about her case.

Custody and Access and Support Payments

Women who have to work out custody and access agreements and/or obtain support payments from abusive ex-partners are at a definite disadvantage in Middlesex County;

There are no lawyers that take legal aid clients for family issues.

This means that women must go to London. Then, of course, they face the challenges already discussed in finding and paying for transportation. One respondent working in Middlesex County reported being asked how to get documents to Legal Aid in London. Such problems put an additional burden of stress on women at a time when they are least well-equipped to deal with it.

Children's Aid Society

There was agreement that Children's Aid Services are generally known in Middlesex County and, like policing, that they are universally available. A closer look reveals that while mandatory child protection services may be readily available, awareness of and access to more innovative programming such as the Community Group Treatment Program for children who have witnessed violence and their mothers is more restricted in remote areas;

There are not sufficient resources to bring all moms together for a group, as happens in London. At this point CAS workers are traveling to them. In the city, we would never have siblings in the same group. In the county, sometimes we have a group of just siblings.

The most common strategy for offering service in Middlesex County is to hold groups in Strathroy. Occasionally, it is possible to go out to a more remote area. Sometimes confidentiality is a big concern. Issues have arisen because moms know each other. In principal, groups for moms should not be comprised of anyone other than moms, but sometimes CAS is approached by foster moms or other caregivers also wanting to participate. In London, it is possible to offer a separate group for caregivers.

One respondent reported that;

An attempt to mix mothers and caregivers in the same group in the county was unsuccessful.

While this can be a problematic situation, another respondent was able to successfully work with it;

One of the mother's groups I did had a mix of foster and biological moms and it was successful. I do know that the previous one didn't go very well, but we were successful with the second one.

There are no supervised access points for parents whose children are in CAS care in Middlesex County outside of London, posing a serious obstacle for parents trying to maintain a relationship with their children and for children who want to continue seeing a parent from whom they have been separated.

Shelter

Several respondents expressed concern over restricted access to women's shelters in Middlesex County. As with many other services, the shelter intended to serve county residents is located in Strathroy. This prompted one respondent to remark that;

There is no shelter in rural Middlesex County. Women may not come to a shelter because they don't know how they will get their kids to school. They have to be mobile. They face the uprooting of their children away from friends and school.

The Women's Rural Resource Centre will help women get to their shelter in Strathroy, but that does not solve all of the transportation problems that women will continue to face. Shelter workers make arrangements for cheaper transportation where possible, but it is a constant challenge both for the women and for the overextended resources of the Shelter;

As women come out of abusive situations, they are able to begin to deal with medical, support and legal issues. WRRC has become the hub to expedite these types of referrals.

Often women are involved with or need service from more than one agency, but none of these agencies have budgets to cover transportation costs.

When women live outside of town and require transportation, costs are very high.

Clearly the lack of access to public transportation complicates service delivery. Nowhere is this more evident than in the situations that shelter workers attempt to help women navigate.

At the same time that shelter workers in Strathroy face extra challenges in assisting the women they serve, they work with fewer resources and diminished opportunities to secure better resources. A respondent explains;

The staff gets smaller with cutbacks and there is a smaller pool of expertise to draw upon. We would like better trained counselling staff, feminists with formal social work qualifications, but because our salaries can't compete with those of other agencies, we tend to hire less qualified staff and therefore we have a great need for ongoing training.

A lack of resources makes it difficult to provide such training. Even when training opportunities arise;

Staff must cover their own expenses for accommodation and food costs.

We are not able to provide professional development to relief staff.

The challenges of providing twenty-four-hour services are amplified by restricted resources;

Relief staff work by themselves, but they tend to be the least qualified because the pay is so low. We need the best problem solvers in these roles, but it's difficult to attain. We need to promote the best to full time.

Grant funding is not a solution to limited resources for a variety of reasons;

It's difficult to compete with larger, better known agencies. It's time consuming to write, monitor and report on grants. Small agencies are disadvantaged in the challenge to come up with the resources needed to get grants. Funders insist on collaboration. It takes time and travel money to develop collaborative relationships. The requirements of grants are too onerous to justify the work it takes to get and implement them.

Other concerns were also expressed about grant funding;

It fragments funding and can fragment service delivery, creating difficulties for women accessing services and agencies delivering services.

Funding may be restricted to specific agencies or sectors or may only be for women who use the criminal justice system and this may not match community preferences for organizing services.

The restricted funding available to the rural shelter leaves that shelter with a long list of services that they would like to provide but cannot;

We would like to be able to offer more mobile services (i.e., send workers to hospitals or other services).

We would like to provide advocacy to women during court processes; to assist them with access to Victim Witness, lawyers' appointments, health care practitioners, government services, housing and employers.

We would like to be able to do more preventative work.

We need to be able to do more work with families when women don't want to leave an abusive partner. We would like to bring in fathers, grandparents and other relatives to help them understand the impact of children witnessing violence and abuse.

We want to do more work with men.

We need to provide programs that are culturally sensitive.

We need to do more work with community leaders and key contacts that have influence [in the community].

A respondent noted that a lot of women chose not to go to shelter because of the stigma attached to doing that. She wished there was an alternative place for women to go, where they could be safe and not be labelled.

The challenges in providing access to emergency shelter to women in Middlesex County are numerous and complex. The services in place are only minimally able to meet the needs of women despite a willingness to be creative and flexible on the part of shelter staff.

Childcare

Unfortunately there is little to report on childcare services in Middlesex County. Respondents summed up the situation very succinctly;

There are no childcare services.

There is a lack of emergency childcare services.

Childcare is not available.

This lack of childcare services was named by women who have experienced abuse and respondents alike as one of the most significant barriers women face in leaving and staying out of abusive relationships.

Counselling

Above we discussed the lack of legal services, but there are also problems related to the availability of counselling;

We have now established a family counselling service funded through Child Supplement Dollars.

This service will fill an obvious gap, but respondents generally recognized that clawing back Federal Child Supplement cheques from women who desperately need the money creates difficulties that cannot necessarily be addressed through counselling.

Several respondents mentioned a lack of choice as being a serious obstacle for those seeking a counsellor;

We need more counsellors.

There is very limited outreach counselling. WRRC offers outreach counselling, but nothing east of Highway 4. Putnam, Dorchester have no outreach counselling.

One respondent lamented the loss of the social worker at Four Counties Hospital;

Previously, we could refer to Four Counties, the social worker, and she would go to schools. She's gone now; no outpatient care. We used to really count on her services.

More supports are needed for childhood sexual abuse survivors. Many women who are victimized as children end up in abusive relationships as adults. Some women who have been in abusive relationships spoke openly of this fact in the focus groups.

Agencies that do provide counselling are limited to short-term counselling. This is adequate for some women, but not for others. And with the scant resources available to them, they are not able to provide advocacy for housing and legal services. Often a woman cannot fully benefit from counselling until these needs have been adequately met. Respondents also noted a lack of therapists in private practice and psychiatrists who are sensitive to violence against women.

And even when the counselling services exist, women face the recurring problems of finding transportation and protecting confidentiality. One respondent observed;

Thursday and Friday work for counselling because she is often coming in for groceries.

Volunteer drivers are sometimes available for various programs, but it's difficult to work together for confidentiality issues.

Housing

There is a lack of housing in rural areas, including emergency housing. There are very few units. A few units geared to adults and a number of units for seniors are available, but there is little for families. This restricts people's opportunities to stay in Strathroy or other communities in Middlesex County. Rent is more reasonable in the county than in the city, but there is limited rental space, and limited geared-to-income housing.

London Housing has two subsidized buildings in Strathroy, but many women are reluctant to live there. They are far from a grocery store and they are perceived as being problem buildings;

Everyone wants to go to Head St. across from Food Basics. There is a big stigma attached to Bella. People don't want to live in Penny Lane because it is perceived as problem kids, problem families. Even women in shelter don't want to go to the five bedroom units. Women want to get into the coops.

One respondent remarked that we need to include Second Stage in our conversation, noting that;

It's especially important in the county. There is no place for a woman in crisis to stay, no place to go. In Parkhill, the only housing available is in apartments above the stores downtown. Where do farm women go?

Affordable housing is critical to a woman's ability to stay out of an abusive relationship. Many times a woman will not even consider leaving if she knows in advance that she will

not be able to obtain housing. This is an area that requires immediate attention from all levels of government.

Income Security

Respondents affirmed that cuts to social services have impacted clients tremendously;

How are women to survive? Poverty is much more extreme.

They noted that people get trapped in a desperate struggle just to survive. Changes to Ontario Works, such as the imposition of mandatory work, have also posed complications for women. A respondent noted that some women are trying to meet that demand and deal with severe behavioural problems with their children.

I see many more cases like this now than before.

When an abused woman has children, often she continues to have to deal with her abuser because he is also the father of her children. This can provide the abuser with an ongoing opportunity to continue to control the woman. When an abused woman requires support payments, she remains financially dependent upon her abuser. This can play havoc in her life;

OW encourages women to get support orders, but partners stop paying and it's difficult to get her reinstated.

An ex-partner's refusal to pay or to pay on time can jeopardize a woman's economic survival. Ontario Works is not responding to support these women quickly and is leaving them extremely vulnerable economically.

Should a woman relocate to London from the county, she faces additional red tape from the system;

Policies that dictate that women from the county be seen by a specific team and if a woman relocates to London, she must go through another assessment.

Questions were raised in a rural focus group about how accessible Ontario Works is to farm women, who often hold joint assets with their abusive partners.

OW would look at liquefiable assets and would ask a woman to make efforts to get something from joint assets. But they would talk to women about what are liquefiable assets and what are not. Cars are not liquefiable. Not all RSPs are liquefiable. If a client was not comfortable or safe contacting a partner, Ontario Works would not ask them to contact a partner.

For a woman who identifies herself as leaving an abusive relationship, some barriers to accessing OW can be removed, but OW does not screen for woman abuse in Middlesex County. It is not a standard question as administrators feel that they may cross boundaries

in that way. This puts the onus squarely on the shoulders of a woman to disclose her situation of abuse. Given the discussion about rural values, that could be a very difficult disclosure.

After an abused woman who requires financial assistance has overcome such obstacles, she continues to face censure from others in the community. A respondent noted that;

The attitude towards people on assistance is very negative.

Another respondent noted that very few women are on social assistance in the county. Many are working for minimum wage in small factories;

There are a lot of working moms that don't have drug benefits or other benefits available to those on Ontario Works.

Additionally, a lot of work is seasonal, making women's financial situations very precarious.

Health Care

Accessing health resources in Middlesex County can be very difficult;

There are no walk-in clinics, no nurse practitioners, and there is a shortage of family doctors. Women have to go to the emergency department at the hospital, for anything. This leaves them with no continuity of care, no prevention and no follow-up. This is not good health care and it is expensive to provide. If a nurse practitioner could go to all of the shelters with the Public Health Nurse, that would provide women with some much-needed medical attention.

Education

Education opportunities in rural communities are quite limited. Women need services to enable them to safely upgrade their education;

Adult Education courses are available, but they are expensive.

A woman's level of education plays an important role in her ability to sustain herself and her family and to live free from an abusive relationship. Currently education is a real barrier to women's ability to lead lives free from violence.

Services for Youth and Young Women

A respondent who works with youth in the country describes seeing deeper poverty than she has seen in city. The list of problems youth are dealing with include;

... addictions, sexual abuse, kids living with men who are taking advantage of their vulnerability (more with girls), a lot of aggression, anger management issues, drug use and psychiatric issues. These are not new issues. They have been present for these youth since public school, but not addressed. We are really

dealing with high-risk kids. They are not going to be okay if you leave them alone.

The context for these youths is grim;

There are no youth centres, nothing for kids to do, no way to escape what is going on at home. There is just nothing for them. Some churches have youth groups, but disenfranchised youth are not into organized religion.

There are no youth shelter beds, no crash beds.

A young student [that I was working with] would have had to change schools and friends in order to leave her abusive situation, and that was too much to cope with.

Not surprisingly;

There is a big drug culture. There is often deep hopelessness.

Other problems were named;

Parents don't want children to achieve more than they have. It is a conservative mentality.

Many younger people don't want to ask for help. They are afraid to ask for help.

There is very little preventative education. You can't do outreach in the high school. Services try, but the high school is not very open to this.

Several respondents drew attention to the gap in services for fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds. Many counselling services are only funded for those sixteen years of age and older;

There is a gap with younger women and the violence starts early.

There is nothing for those kids. Kids need a letter of consent from their parents in order to receive counselling, but often can't get it. This is part of the problem.

We need to start educating younger and speak to more boys about abusive behaviour being unacceptable. Girls do know that it's unacceptable, but if everyone is doing it, then they think it must be okay. We have to get to the children who are witnessing violence. How are we going to deal with making a change for the future?

The John Howard Society is one agency that is working with youth, and more work like this needs to happen.

If students need condoms, their parents will find out if they buy them at the pharmacy. They have just started to have better access to birth control, but they have to ask permission from a teacher to access that service. There is no anonymity. They do provide condoms in Guidance. Glencoe has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the province.

A respondent reported that the Guidance Counsellor at Glencoe is excellent. Still many barriers remain. For example, there are no female doctors whom young women can see.

Youth in the county do not want to come to London. A respondent said that she has offered to find a place in the shelter or a group home for young women in trouble, but they do not want to do it. They want to stay in their community;

They will set themselves up in all kinds of dysfunctional situations to stay. There are many situations of older people preying on young, vulnerable people.

Outreach and Awareness of Service

Some respondents felt that there is a lot of information, but that it is difficult for some women to access it. A lack of public awareness was named as the problem;

Women living closer to larger towns, who get community papers and who are in touch with word of mouth networks are more aware. More isolated women, further out in rural areas, may not know as much about what help is available.

Perceptions of how much awareness exists varied. One respondent noted that once someone makes use of a service, the referral network is good. Some respondents felt that women are aware of available services and that an informal secondary referral system exists through high schools, police, family doctors and crisis lines that are familiar with the services;

A lot of people go to the GAINS Centre to find out what is available. It is not intimidating because going there doesn't identify you as having a particular problem. A range of services are available.

Yet, another respondent remarked that members of the Lion's Club didn't even know about the Shelter in Strathroy and that a lot of medical people don't know about the services that are available. As a respondent noted;

Consistently women in shelter say they rely primarily on friends and family for information about woman abuse and services. This speaks to the need to raise awareness on a community-wide basis and to disseminate information widely.

As one respondent asserted;

We need to engage our community to stop the violence and use our schools to change the thinking.

A rural focus group had several ideas for ways to use existing community networks and institutions to raise awareness;

The Federation of Agriculture is willing to help get some information flowing. They are giving out kits on stress-related issues. These are kits on product-related materials. Information about woman abuse could be included that doesn't target individuals, but gives out information that can be used generally. The tone could be one of, 'You may know someone who needs this.'

The Women's Institute is an important network for rural women, and libraries were identified as a good point of distribution for information. It was suggested that the head branch could help to distribute materials to smaller branches. 4H is a strong organization in the county. In fact, Middlesex has the largest 4H in Ontario;

Programs can be developed by anyone interested who has an understanding of 4H. Relationships would be an excellent project topic for clubs.

One respondent remarked that the 4H provides a direct link to mothers who may be abused through their children. She spoke about shelters going into schools and talking to kids about violence awareness and seeing those kids talk to their moms. Many women came forward for their kids. The same potential may exist through 4H clubs.

It was also suggested that services could build networks with church groups;

Those are the caring people that would carry the flag.

When people who live and work in rural communities sit down and begin talking, they reveal an intricate web of networks and possibilities for communication. Tapping into these existing networks in order to educate residents about woman abuse will require some creativity, some cooperation and collaboration and some resources. There is no lack of interest in raising awareness about woman abuse, but the work is not likely to move too far ahead if it falls to already overworked service providers.

Services for Men

There was acknowledgement that there is little response for men who are seeking help in Middlesex County. A respondent identified the need to develop skills to work with men and the need to tap into the strength of rural communities to do this work. Some suggested that we need to empower the community to hold men accountable for violence they commit against women;

Institutions like the church and the extended family can support men's violence or hold men accountable.

While involving the traditional institutions of the community in ending violence against women is a very good idea, the support of agencies with specific expertise is still

required. As discussed above, men in the county may not be able to access Changing Ways groups because of a lack of transportation;

Some men on probation are given very short supervision orders, and there may not be enough time to start a group while he is bound by an order. There is fear that abuse will continue in the home unreported in these cases.

Multiple Layers of Isolation for Rural Women

Abuse is characterized by the isolation of the victim. Rural women are particularly vulnerable to isolation. Geographic isolation is a fact of rural life. And as a respondent states;

Geographic isolation is problematic when abusive men control the transportation.

Due to geographic isolation, neighbours may not know what is going on;

Often the closest neighbours are family members of the abuser and are invested in keeping the abuse a secret.

Each time you add a factor that contributes to isolation, such as a mental health problem, or being First Nations, it becomes more of a challenge for a woman to make connections and for service providers to respond.

Farm Women

Respondents explained that challenges for farm women in abusive relationships are tied up with the nature of farming practice;

Woman abuse is a farm safety issue.

The woman leaving the relationship can mean the end of the farming practice. In rural areas, women are tied to the farm. It is their livelihood.

A number of women don't have access to a bank account or an independent income.

Farms are family businesses. The family is also a business, and if either spouse leaves, both economic livelihoods are destroyed. If the man is removed the whole business can fall apart.

If women are to access financial benefits, they have to divest themselves of assets.

Farm and rural business situations have similar dynamics.

When police arrest, they will remove the man. All men have to agree not to have any communication with the victim and not attend where she is living. If she is in the house and the kids are in the house, he can't go back there. The problem is

that she will say, 'You have to let him back between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. to do the chores, but he can't go near the house.' He is out there, she is isolated and he has access to guns. Kids may be used in those situations to facilitate hostile and sometimes even intimidating communication between the abusive man and the abused woman.

A focus group participant from the farming community talked about another significant barrier for farm women in abusive situations;

My sense is that the dissolution of the immediate family and the farm would also affect the extended family. Often groups of brothers own farms together. There is a social stigma associated with a person responsible for breaking up a family or business. The community is an extension of the family and those values.

Another respondent added;

There is a mentality among women who have been raised on farms that you cannot break out of this, that you cannot face the stigma of breaking up the farm. Often abusers are well-liked in their community.

A focus group participant from a farming community explained that;

A lot of times when we speak of abuse, we mean physical, and there is a lot of emotional abuse that is not recognized. I think it's more prevalent with farm women. I know a number of women experiencing that, but they can't address it. They don't have access to services. They don't have financial resources and the farms are in the names of husbands. Women don't recognize that they are being abused; it just goes with the territory.

In a rural focus group participants asked a series of questions;

How do we reach out to farm women and reframe who is responsible for breaking up the farm?

How do we help people to understand that it is the abuser's actions that are responsible for breaking up the family and the farm, not the woman?

How can we help women to leave?

One woman at the table noted;

I'm always surprised that women don't know their rights.

Suggestions emerged from this discussion that included providing legal information about property rights to women and letting them know that they don't have to leave the farm when their husbands or partners are being abusive. It was noted that women are

motivated to do things for their kids and that we can let them know about the impact of witnessing woman abuse on kids. Participants agreed that we have to pay attention to how we frame the issue, being careful not to further blame or stigmatize abused women.

Respondents expressed increasing concern about the need to work together in order to reach farm women;

We know that women are at higher risk when those [financial] stresses are there and we may be approaching a crisis in the farming community.

A researcher noted that we don't know what the rate of abuse among farm women is, but clearly it has the potential to increase.

Last year at the International Plowing Match, Women's Rural Resource Centre had a booth. There was agreement that this is but a start to the outreach and education that is needed to reach farm women. Some respondents noted that work on reaching farm women has already been done;

CAPRO looked at where can we educate and be effective. The Ontario Farm Women's Network were key players. We don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Culturally Diverse Communities

Many respondents spoke about the homogeneous population of Middlesex County and noted that there is very little cultural diversity. But there are communities of people with distinct cultures. The one most often mentioned was the Portuguese community. There was agreement that women from this community don't seek help outside of the family and the Portuguese community and that there is little understanding of woman abuse. Rural values that discourage help seeking outside of the family in the rural community are also values of the Portuguese community.

In Portuguese and rural culture, you don't seek help outside of family

Similarly respondents noted that the Mennonite community does not seek help outside of family. In this community, there is limited access to all technology, including transportation;

Mennonite society generally doesn't call the police.

A respondent noted that;

CAPRO has done some work with the Portuguese and Mennonite communities in the past. They came up with the idea of training facilitators [from within the community] to work in these communities.

Seasonal workers come during the summer from Jamaica;

These migrant workers are not seen as part of the community. They remain isolated.

Some respondents noted a lack of cultural sensitivity towards the First Nations community. One respondent noted that;

There are some native kids in Strathroy, and there is no understanding of their cultural background.

This lack of cultural sensitivity deepens a sense of isolation and alienation, leaving the most vulnerable with even more restricted access to supportive services.

Lack of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Confidentiality or the lack of it in rural settings was named as a significant problem;

Confidentiality is a concern, and women are not willing to seek out service. They say to themselves, 'If I go in that door the neighbours will all know, so I won't go.'

There are still some party lines in the county.

Obviously this could serve to restrict access to information and support available over the telephone.

Women can't trust that their confidentiality will be respected because they often know people who are working in the services. When clients do understand that their confidentiality will be respected, they fear that they will be seen by a neighbour. This really leaves them with no one to go to if they are being abused. Respondents explained;

Women need a place where they feel safe to come, a non-threatening environment. Rural women don't want a service where they will be known. They don't want to be re-victimized by gossip.

Many times women are not given a chance in their own communities. They don't have an opportunity to be present and be who they are and not mask who they are. If they can come to a place where there is no judgment and no shame attached, it can be a strength builder.

If women can find ways to access services outside of their own communities, it can help them.

This again speaks to the desperate need for transportation and the barrier that it poses for abused women.

Even group therapy is difficult to deliver because of close community connections and a reluctance to meet people who are known in therapy. A respondent working in a Multi-Service Centre noted;

Counsellors would offer a group, but women won't come because of confidentiality concerns. We need general groups where they won't be stigmatized [as they] share and grow. Sometimes it helps that services are available from a multi-purpose centre, but women are still likely to be seen.

The problems surrounding the issue of confidentiality are related to the nature of rural communities, but they are also related to a mentality that blames women for the abuse they experience and the shame that results from that. Providing transportation to women so that they can access service outside of their own community is one solution. Continuing to work to raise awareness about the need to hold perpetrators of abuse responsible for their actions will begin to enable women to feel comfortable accessing services in their own community. The words of one respondent working in a rural setting reinforce this,

Services need to be available in smaller communities. Many people are intimidated by big services. At the beginning, many said that people wouldn't use services, but that hasn't been true. There is a trend in services coming to the county and more interest in services, more inquiries. The stigma has eased and it's easier for people to come forward.

Options for Service Delivery

Currently, there are five Multi-Service Centres in Middlesex County, funded primarily through HRSDC. The intent of these Centres is to allow someone to come in and access several different services and agencies. There is a large focus on Employment Insurance and related programs. They include the GAINS Centre in Strathroy, the Quest Centre in Glencoe, the Parkhill Multi-Service Centre, the Ausable Centre in Lucan and the Dorchester Employment Resource Centre in the Dorchester Library. Staff from these Centres meet monthly to discuss concerns and issues. They usually have a guest speaker. As a result of interviews conducted for this project, a speaker was invited to one of these meetings to present information about woman abuse and the referral network of existing services.

Several of these Centres are already involved in addressing woman abuse;

The existence of the Quest Centre, open four years now, has improved access to service, as it enables the WRRC counsellor to meet women here. She went from spending half a day here to one and a half days and it has been very helpful to have her come out this way. The school has sent over students occasionally. A link is growing between the public health nurse, the school guidance counsellor and the WRRC counsellor.

The Parkhill Multi-Service Centre provides space for an impressive array of service providers, enhancing access for the local community. They organize a Health Fair every two years and do regular outreach to the high school, church groups and service clubs. The John Howard Society, Family Service London, the Sexual Assault Centre London and Search Community Mental Health Services all have a counsellor based there. Probation and Parole uses office space and See Saw, a peer group for people who are bipolar, runs out of the office.

The GAINS Centre in Strathroy offers spaces to a wide array of services. We have already acknowledged that Strathroy is a hub for many organizations that serve Middlesex County. Women's Rural Resource Centre is the focal point for services specific to woman abuse, but many complimentary services are located at the GAINS Centre. Ontario Works has offices and meet clients there, as does ODSP. LEADS has an office. LEADS will assist women who have experienced abuse in finding employment. Probation and Parole meets clients. Fanshawe College has Continuing Education classes in the evening. During the day the Strathroy Adult Learning Centre runs credit courses through the Thames Valley District School Board. There is a literacy and numeracy component program to provide upgrading to continue onto credit courses. London Interfaith Counselling has been contracted through HRSDC to provide service to those in receipt of employment insurance. The John Howard Society counsels primarily youth and St. Leonard's Society works with youth who have been ordered to do community service. Family Service London offers general short-term counselling, funded through a grant from the County of Middlesex and Credit Counselling London, which recently merged with FSL. ATN works with those with learning disabilities and provides one-on-one tutoring. Two employment counsellors, funded through HRSDC, work there. There is access to computers, primarily for job searches and career planning. GAINS has partnered with the Middlesex London Health Unit to share meeting space and offices. Staff from OHIP come two days each month to do new health cards. Applications for Social Insurance Numbers, passports and Canada Pension are available, along with Income Tax Forms. Community Information is on the shelves and GAINS staff get lots of questions about services. They have general knowledge about what is available and make many referrals.

These multipurpose centres are one model of service delivery. They can be a cost-effective way of bringing a greater range of services to various parts of the county. Many respondents pointed out, however, that this sort of model cannot be viewed as a panacea for the problems of availability of and accessibility to woman abuse services in Middlesex County.

Services under one roof is what we are stuck with; there are not a lot of options. There is not much security in any of those locations; transportation is still a big problem. They probably serve both perpetrators and victims in the same place. Confidentiality is served; there could be a lot of reasons why you are there.

Services have always done what is easiest for service providers, set up outreach sites. Going to women's homes, taking service to her, is exceptional. We do what

works for service providers, but we also need to try and accommodate individual needs. CAS have voluntary clients because they go to homes.

Specific gaps and concerns were observed by respondents which should be taken into consideration when reflecting on optimal models of service delivery;

I would like to be able to offer more groups.

I would like to see a parenting or life skills group, maybe overlapping with WRCC.

Services that are in the county are not flexible enough. We can't get OW to come to shelter unless there is extreme danger.

There are many practical services in terms of food and clothing that we should also make accessible.

Respondents noted that there will always be some services that we can't take to women and that better transportation continues to be needed;

Victim Witness Assistance Program is still in London and the Crown Attorney is still in London. Housing applications have to be faxed to London and communication is complicated. If financing were there to transport women to London, that would ease the situation.

It was noted that Alcohol and Drug Services and the John Howard Society took a step in the right direction when they decided to extend service to the county two days a week;

... regularly and ongoing, not sporadic or dependent upon numbers.

Several respondents expressed a desire for other agencies to follow suit.

Many respondents felt that there is also a need to reevaluate service models. The suggestion to have a generalized advocate trained in offering multiple supports was repeatedly mentioned. This would be an alternative source of support to work in tandem with existing services;

Create a superworker, an advocate who is mobile, for working with women and kids.

Do some cross-training and have someone available for legal needs and also housing needs.

This suggestion was not put forward as a solution for all problems and respondents added;

We will still have the transportation issue. It's appealing as long as it doesn't become the only way in and slow down access to service.

Sometimes solutions lie in the ability of agencies to be flexible. A Public Health Nurse noted that she was impressed with WRRRC;

I had a client and they made an exception and came to her home and sat in the car with her, while I looked after her kids in the house.

An observation surfaced several times that;

The number one support for women is friends and family.

The suggestion that followed was;

Let's educate the community on how to respond to abused women and their families. There is a need to build capacity in community to support women, as well as a need for service development. This approach would help women stay in their community.

Another suggestion supported an alternative model of service delivery;

Mentoring in a rural area is one of the most cost-effective ways of providing ongoing support and anchoring change. The professionals focus on immediate, serious and complicated needs, but the mentor is a phone call away. It's very important in the rural areas because of the issue of isolation. This is the biggest factor that stops a person from self-referring and inhibits the ongoing success of a case. You really have to look at cost-effectiveness in the county because you have a large geographic area and isolation is a reality.

Whatever model is implemented, there was consensus that there is a need to improve transportation and childcare and that resources to meet these needs can't come from within existing agency budgets. A need for the development of subsidized and free transportation services was clearly expressed over and over again by respondents.

Rural – Urban Collaboration

Respondents perceive an inequity in service provision on all fronts in the county.

Police response is less consistent due to multiple services. There are fewer supports outside of shelter; lawyers, housing and childcare are harder to access.

There were strong feelings that the needs of rural women in Middlesex County are not being met, that their issues are being overlooked and that services in London bear some responsibility for addressing the situation;

Most services that are based in London are responsible for delivering service to the county. Most are funded to deliver services in the county, and they should be engaged in problem solving on how to do this.

In nine out of ten counties in the region served by one provincial government ministry, there is not the same separation between city and county that we see between London and Middlesex. No other county has two coordinating committees. For example, the Windsor-Essex Coordinating Committee takes responsibility for the whole area.

In Elgin County they have spent the last three years developing protocols and seeing how services link and work together.

There must be a will of London services to assist with problem solving around service delivery in the county.

London-based service providers addressed some of the challenges they face in meeting this expectation;

It's financially prohibitive to set up an office and put staff there. It takes a lot of time and it's harder to network with agencies that are farther away.

To go to the LCCEWA takes ten minutes travel time; it is two hours to go the MCCEWA. This limits the ability to keep connected with agencies in the county.

A respondent acknowledged some efforts by London-based agencies to serve the rural community, but pointed out the shortcomings in the approach as well;

A lot of London agencies have tried to put service in county, but it is not a priority for them. Sometimes workers get dumped out there. They are on their own, and it's hard to keep programming flexible and adapted to needs.

To address this problem, it makes sense to share resources and to work together across agencies. It was even suggested that it might be possible to coordinate a transportation service. Innovative thinking will help to meet the challenges;

Sometimes we need to be more flexible and creative. We can connect via teleconference for meetings in London. It is preferable to not being able to participate at all. We can have a counselling session on the phone with a woman who can't make it in to her appointment. It helps her from being completely isolated.

A London-based respondent felt that;

It is insulting to think that urban services have solutions for rural problems. We want to have good links and want to enhance services that grow from rural expertise.

None of the county respondents contradicted this logic, but they did feel that urban communities are not accountable enough to rural communities and that there is a need to recognize needs existing in rural areas and to build plans for meeting these needs into the programs of agencies based in London. And one respondent pointed out that although people make an honest effort to work collaboratively,

The existing situation is an opportunity not to be well-coordinated.

Simply put;

Everyone who works in this area has an obligation to ensure equitable service to all abused women.

**ADDRESSING THE IMBALANCES OF SERVICE IN LONDON
AND THE REST OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY**

“The way we talk about rural communities shows that we really don’t want to know.”

A primary goal of this report was to examine the inequities in service provision that exist between London and the surrounding rural areas of Middlesex County. The section focusing on *The Rural Context* does that. That section also contains the seeds of many ideas for beginning to address those inequities. But before we can begin to effectively work towards improving access to service for abused women and their children in the rural areas, a fundamental shift must take place. London-based service providers and decision makers, who control many of the available resources and who control the flow of those resources, must accept responsibility for serving all of Middlesex County. The current structures reinforce the geographic isolation of rural-based services and the urban-rural divide. Respondents in a rural focus group reported feeling that;

Rural women are not getting their needs met and rural issues are overlooked.

Feeling frustrated by the inequities, some respondents question;

Why is there a separate Coordinating Committee for Middlesex?

Others reflect on the history of the separation;

When the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee was formed most London-based services didn’t have satellite offices. The intent [of the MCCCEWA] was to connect with local services.

There was a concern that if the Committees were combined we would lose rural voices or the Middlesex Committee would become subordinate to the London Committee.

However legitimate the separation, respondents made it clear that there are downsides to it;

The two Coordinating Committees contribute to the lack of uniformity in police response.

Currently, rural issues are invisible to London.

Some respondents advocated merging the two Coordinating Committees;

It would help to have one Coordinating Committee. I would like to see more coordination between the city and the county around initiatives.

But respondents also noted that working in different contexts, the two Coordinating Committees have evolved differently;

In Middlesex, we are more hands on and do public education and outreach. London is more focused on policy concerns.

There was a strong sense that this is work worth sustaining. One respondent suggested a way of doing this if the Committees merged;

Perhaps we could have a Rural Issues Committee doing some of the work that we have started around public education.

Overall, there was a large degree of agreement, particularly from rural respondents, that;

Somehow we have to be more integrated.

One of the issues many respondents felt it is most important to address is a uniform police response throughout the county. Some expressed hope that this goal can be assisted through a new structure;

Integration of the two Coordinating Committees will lead to more uniform police response.

A respondent pointed out that it will be important to think about how to restructure in a way that will make both Committees more effective;

We don't want Middlesex to become subordinate to London, which could happen through a subcommittee structure.

Another respondent suggested;

We could have an annual consultation with groups like farm groups and people like Joan Nicole from the Parkhill Multi-Service Centre.

One respondent proposed a starting place for moving forward;

The vision of a coordinating committee is to be a group of representatives. There would be better coordination if the two groups sat together. The focus would not be solely on the rural areas or the city. The needs might be different and strategies might be different, but issues are the same. This could provide a unique opportunity to recommend policy that speaks to all abused women and their children.

WHAT DO WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE THINK?

Two focus groups were held, one with women who had accessed services through agencies in London and one with women who had accessed service through Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy. Women were invited to talk about what they saw as gaps in service based on their own experiences. This is what they had to say;

Women from the London-Based Focus Group

Victim Witness Assistance was helpful and the Crown as well. I worked with the Crown a lot before the trial. She pushed for the Dangerous Offender Act, and it took one and a half years, and it finally went through. I went to LAWC as well. Someone else called the police. The police response was good. They laid charges right away.

He wouldn't let me leave with the kids. I had to escape the house and go to the store to call the police. When the police came, I was so scared. I said, 'No, he didn't hit me.' I wanted to charge him, but I didn't. When Children's Aid came, they saw what happened in the house. They said they [the police] should charge him. The same officer came back as when I called the first time. There was a woman and a man and they said, 'No, you can't change your mind like that.' But the woman probably would have charged him. My husband was involved in something earlier and when they [the police] found out that we weren't together anymore, they asked me to testify against him. They said that I should charge him. They sent the same officer and he said, 'You have no credibility with the police,' even if I had a black eye and a broken arm. In the past, I would have hidden information from the police, and now I was willing to tell them, but they didn't help. When police want help from you, they want you to cooperate, but when you need help, they don't help, and they wonder why you won't rat someone out or testify. And then I came here (LAWC) and one of the women I talked to said that she was going to follow up with a woman from the police service and see about getting him charged. If he had been charged, I wouldn't have been attacked by his mother and his sister in court. A cop lady came into the washroom just in time. I was in court for custody of my kids.

I had to deal with CAS because they can't be in his care and then we'll deal with custody. Court is long. CAS was done quickly. He can't get himself a proper lawyer, and we always have to wait for him to file papers. I have a legal aid lawyer and he's been good. He's been my parent's lawyer. My parents were originally paying for him, but then it was so much that I had to get legal aid. There are two kids and one of them is not mine. There are different people fighting me for custody, the biological mother and the father.

I use Merrymount and they are good, but getting subsidy is so annoying. I go to my [OW] worker and they say, 'I don't have anything to do with this.' I have all the paperwork filled out. The subsidy people say that I have to deal with my [OW] worker. I have to get so many different letters, that I have custody, that I'm

going to Merrymount and from people in my building that I'm going to groups. It's so much added stress. My kids are in daycare, but I don't know whose paying for it.

My [OW] worker says I have dependents under five and I should be home. I don't qualify for [daycare] subsidy, but I have court dates and groups. The welfare system sucks. I had a good worker, but she went on maternity leave. They are supposed to train them on woman abuse, but it's not helping.

They don't need to train them [OW workers] in woman abuse, they need to train them in human beings. They don't have a concern for people.

My [OW] worker bends over backwards for me. The majority aren't like that. She goes beyond what she should be doing in some cases.

She's [OW worker] put my cheque on hold twice now. If she trains others it will be a cycle.

My [OW] worker is great, but she is training another one and she goes in and pulls out stuff and next thing I know my cheque is on suspension.

Another thing is birth certificates. They are on seven month backlog. I'm having a big problem with my [OW] worker. My baby is nine months and I still don't have his certificate and my other son is not my biological son, and that's why my cheque is on suspension now. I wasn't leaving until I could leave with my [non-biological] son. Why should I leave when I had him since he was three months?

I'm new to this because when I came I didn't know there was services for abused women. For the first week and a half, they [shelter] were really good and supportive and next week I'm coming here [LAWC.] Maybe because I live in an isolated [ethno-cultural] community. So far, my family doesn't know where I am, I'm kind of hiding and running. It helps that others in the shelter know what you have gone through. The kids have adjusted very well. I haven't been involved with the police or courts.

I hope that I don't get too judgmental or critical about stuff. I try to see the positive, do for the kids. I think because I had to deal with the cultural thing first. For years, I had my family support, but now I don't. Now I have other support. Maybe I can change the cycle for my children's sake. Stop the cycle. For my safety's sake and my children's sake, I'm glad I came [to the shelter.] Everyone else, doctors, school, don't know anything.

My nurse sees the signs of abuse, but doesn't say anything. She slid me the card from WCH very quietly. We should be more open, have a worker from that culture to go and talk to people. In the long run, the more people that know where they can go, the better. Just because you're a woman, a guy can't do this to you.

I think there are a lot of holes in the system. When I met and married my husband, it was all under a lot of false pretences, a lot of lies and shadows that didn't come forward until ten days after; other partners and children, assaults against children, children removed from the biological mother and placed for adoption, everything I'm against. My daughter had gone to school. The social worker says, 'How did things go [with the wedding]?' And she said, 'Good. But when he played with me, he left bruises.' We walk into the [school] office and the CAS worker shakes my husband's hand. By the time we got out of there, I found out I am partner number four. But my religion and culture said until death do us part. Until finally I played him. He put money in the bank for rent and I called a moving truck and a storage unit.

This man is screwing my life up big time and my daughter's life. Why is this stuff not public information? Why can't I call CAS and know if they've had any involvement with him or do a CPIC? It's sad because he's going to move onto the next women. Partner number five. There's going to be more babies. He's said that's his goal in life; he's going to populate.

I'm declaring bankruptcy. I had to declare bankruptcy because when you have the income, you get the bad credit.

The police, you call them and get a restraining order, but it's only five hundred feet and he can stand there and spit nickels at you. When you do pick up your phone and tell them he's there, they don't get there in time to get him.

These people can be very persuasive and very loving, but it's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. There should be a data base for abusive men.

I lived with a man for eight years. He was ten years my senior. Both he and his [ex] wife have serious drug problems. When her daughter graduated, she gave her a joint to celebrate.

I had to leave my step kids, and I can't contact them because the adults will know where I am. There was physical abuse, but more emotional. It really left a lot of serious scars. And it's hard to get people to take it seriously. He kept me very isolated.

One of the ways he was abusive towards me was; he's a man who makes over \$60,000.00 a year, but when I went on OW my standard of living went up. Now he has to pay me a lot of support.

I've always had a problem with depression, but no matter how many anti-depressants, it was never enough. I told my sister about it and she directed me to LAWC and they spoke to me and told me I was definitely being abuse. They directed me to the shelter.

I had to leave while he was at work. I was so afraid that he would find where I was. I went to Second Stage, and now I'm really scared because if he finds out where I am, he'll be at my door and playing head games.

I'm at Fanshawe. I had to borrow \$9,000.00 in OSAP and I had to pay \$2,500.00 for childcare. She [OW worker] told me I didn't qualify for a subsidy. She said, 'Oh, I get it, you have to pay them [OSAP] back, but you don't have to pay us back.' I don't even talk to them anymore. I don't get it; I'm doing what I'm supposed to do.

The system makes you feel like you are bad because you made one wrong choice. The cops are like that, the courts are like that, welfare are like that. I've had a welfare worker talk to another worker about me. I've had a cop tell me that I deserve it because I chose someone from Jamaica. I've had a cop tell me I deserved it because I took him back. But if he has a job and you don't, and you have to feed your kids... My own family told me, 'Don't raise your kids without a dad.' I took him back and he didn't smack me around anymore, but he can play the most ridiculous head games. He has sucked everything out of me. I did criminal things to be in a relationship with him. I honestly got to a point where the only reason I left is because I was having a problem with CAS and I won't lose my kids over it.

You get good CAS workers and you get shitty ones, just like welfare.

You get someone who helps you and listens to you, and it's almost worse because then you expect that the next person will, and it's not like that.

You get bad workers and it could literally be the difference between life and death, not just for you, but for your kids too. And they don't see their role in that.

I come from an abusive background and I was raised not to expect more.

When this guy said he loved me and when he said I'm doing this for your own good, it sounded like things my mother said; it was so familiar. I met this guy when I was very young.

He kicked me in the stomach. I had a hole in my placenta and I was on bed rest for six months and I still didn't leave him. And my family is saying, 'If you stay with him, we'll try to help you stick it out,' and that's how you get in these situations; you always try to make them happy.

I was on my way to being an Olympic gymnast and I broke my own arm because I didn't want to do it anymore. I was getting sick and I was having eating disorders, and my mom didn't care. She said, 'Well, does this mean I'll have to pay for your education now?'

We have a sign on us that is invisible, but they see it. They see that they can do it. I've been abused by my mother, by my father, my stepfather. I've been physically, sexually, emotionally abused, and you really do believe it is your fault, and then when you do try to leave, the system shuts doors on you.

I have obviously made bad choices. And even now, am I making the right choices? I've made so many mistakes, and I'm too old to keep making mistakes. That's why services need to be there because you need to do something, even for a two-year goal for making a better life.

You need financial support to get out. Rents for one bedroom are \$625.00 and housing allowance is \$511.00 for a woman with two kids.

My girlfriend's children are in daycare, and they spend a lot more for daycare than they do for housing and food. That is abuse. We're chastised for leaving the abuser and the financial support. You get chastised for working and you get chastised for not working. And now when you try to work, you get money taken, and they tell you to get child support from your husband and they take it dollar for dollar. If you were working, they allow you to keep some money.

I think it's a cycle. I dated a guy for year and he broke my hand and I had welts on my face. I maybe went into an abusive relationship from watching my mom. My mom has never hit me, but I was sexually assaulted from the time I was three. When I was three, I was sexually assaulted by my mom's boyfriend.

I've been in the court system since I was three when I was sexually molested. Then my mom married my step dad and we've been to every shelter in Thunder Bay, and they won't take us any more because my step dad knows where we are and it's not safe for others. I was in court for my step dad because he tried to have sex with me in grade nine. I don't care for CAS. I didn't tell anyone for a year with my step dad and we went to court and they still let my sisters live in that house.

My mom went back to my step dad. I had a brand new pit bull and he went to the basement and cut off its tail. I found a gun and some cocaine. I went into the basement and gave my dog crushed Tylenol. My step dad threw me against the wall and my mom and I ran out the door and she called the police and the police called back. My step dad replaced the cocaine with baking soda and gave away the gun. He sat out in front of the house. I think the police think of it as a joke just to watch.

We've moved so much and lost all of our stuff.

I work and I go to school, and they treat me like I don't do anything. They take money from me, but they take it from my mom's cheque too because I live with

her and I pay rent to her. I don't care for OW because I lived with my mom for fourteen years. We cleaned and cooked and we never had a relationship and now I want to live with my mom. I'm working and going to school. I never got my high school because we moved so many times.

I did a speech to tell court workers and judges how to help more.

How are you supposed to get ahead? You're not. You're only supposed to be in the help mode.

It's a full time job just to look for work. What do you do with the kids meantime? Not just that, where is your outfit? Or what about your teeth? You need an extreme makeover to get a job these days.

When I go to school, my mom drives me, and at the end of the month I can take in the receipts, but what am I supposed to do until the end of the month? How is she supposed to pay for that gas?

They [OW] put me on suspension. I dropped off the paperwork and they can't find it.

When you have a man and a house and food, at least you know you were going to be taken care of; so what if you had a black eye?

My church is my biggest support. He wants to make it hard for me; he doesn't want me to have any support other than him. Everything that I had was his. I came from a background of abuse, neglect, CAS, alcohol, you name it. I didn't see what was happening. My reverend was there through the whole thing. She still is.

CAS wouldn't go in because the grandmother swore she would protect the kids and not let him hurt them, but she was abusing them.

I got the kids and I left. I went right to the crisis centre. He had a brother and a brother-in-law and they were OPP officers. I didn't feel safe there. They put me on a bus [to London.]

I didn't see how bad it was until I spoke to someone else. I was raised that way and I have a high tolerance for that.

People in the community judge and criticize before they even know the story. We tell these bad things about these guys and they don't think that they might be true. I went to the family doctor and he said, 'Well, you two have been under a lot of stress.'

They [the abusers] think you are sitting on a lot of money. They really do think that we are sitting on some nest egg. They don't know that it's a mother survival

thing and we would do whatever we need to do. I would get kneepads and go help Bill Clinton if that's what I needed to do for my kids.

They [the abusers] make you think that you don't need or deserve anything.

My mom told him I was dating someone and next thing I know I have a jealous ex-husband sitting on my porch with a loaf of bread interrogating me. All of a sudden I am to quit my job. He's not supposed to be in my house. I let him in. He called CAS and told them he had been in my home. He calls the bank and tells them not to transfer any more money, even though it's my money. He calls the place I'm renting the appliances from and tells them I'm going to take off without paying.

I'm needy, I'm vulnerable, I'm lonely and I need someone to talk to. This is not who I was born to be; this is not where I want to be. It's agencies that you go to for help that judge you. Even here you don't know how much you want to tell because you don't know who you can trust.

I've had nothing but help from everybody that I've turned to. I work, but my [OW] worker makes sure I am still on assistance so that I have a drug card. I have a [childcare] subsidy. So when you talk about these problems, I have no idea what you are talking about because everyone has helped me.

When my husband got arrested, I determined I wasn't going to take it anymore. The day I left is the day my life started. I said I'm not leaving until I get the answers I need. I wouldn't let them put me down. If you get frustrated and leave, that's what they want. I've never got angry with them. I didn't use the fact that I was abused to get what I need. I had money struggles big time and my counsellor helped me get an interest free loan.

They don't do it [interest free loans] anymore. There are lots of things that were there even six months ago that don't exist anymore.

I think that what you are saying is right. I was treated like dirt until I said I won't be treated like dirt anymore. All summer, my kids went to camp for free. I didn't threaten people; I just asked them to explain what the problem was exactly. I am educated and I'm intelligent. Sometimes they wouldn't even say no and I would hear no. They said no for disability and I appealed. And I got the money.

I know people who have been jerked around for years by disability. My mother-in-law is the biggest con artist and she has disability.

That does happen, and that's also why the system treats us like dirt, because some people do cheat the system. It all depends who you get and what you're willing to do. Just don't stop. Send them pictures of your kids and say, 'Here are the kids you said no to.'

I was on disability until I was eighteen and then I was cut off, and it's been on appeal for four years.

Never give up the fight.

My daughter stares into the mirror and changes her cloths a lot and still thinks she is ugly. I got an application for a job, but all I could hear is his voice saying, 'You're a retard.'

My husband walked up to me and said, 'Don't take me to court or you'll be dead.' He keeps telling me right in front of the police, 'I'll take you and I'll snap your neck.'

My kids would say, 'Mom, you go back every time. Why do you go back?' I couldn't see it. I kept thinking I should go back. My mother-in-law would say, 'You are married to him. You got married in a Catholic Church, and it's a sin.' And I would go back. It took me fourteen years to know what I was doing to my kids and to myself. But all that time, I didn't. When I would run away to one of the shelters, I would listen to them. So those little things were opening my eyes, and that's what made me stronger, the papers they would give me, the knowledge, and I would go back, and each time I would open my eyes a little more.

The CAS worker would come to the house, but then they would sit there and they would say, 'Oh, my god, this guy is so charming.' He would go to anger management and they would tell him what to say. Finally he blew up at the CAS worker.

I was so scared of the beatings. I've been pushed out of the van when I was driving and had my head smashed into the dashboard.

My mom got beat for a quarter, because she needed a quarter for laundry.

The police came to the house one time and he said, 'What do you want to do, fuck my wife?' I would take the two younger kids and she [the older daughter] would stay behind and then he wouldn't let her leave and I'd have to go back. He wouldn't give me my kids, so I'd go back.

The shelters are usually really good. I've only had one bad experience in Thunder Bay. The shelter said that they would transfer me and my kids to London and they told me they wouldn't take me again in Thunder Bay.

I had a similar experience in Toronto, and after I ended up with a hole in my placenta, I just stayed because I knew no one would help me.

We have to get out [of shelter] and there are not apartments. Where are we supposed to go?

I can't get into London housing because I can't even get put into the computer until I pay damages from the previous place. I didn't sign a move-out sheet and I got charged for damage that was already there. So now I can't even get on the list until this bill is paid off. I can make an agreement and pay it off a little at a time. While I'm waiting for an agreement, time is running out for me. I'll just end up in a hole and I'll end up back where I started from.

I owe \$2,000.00 in Toronto because they let him stay and he did the damage.

The other place they really need to do some work with the kids and with the moms is in the schools. My daughter is an A student. Their report cards is not the problem, but they have seen me upset and they are depressed and they are asking, 'Why do we have to live on welfare? At least we had stuff there. But we don't want to go back and walk on eggshells.' But automatically I think, 'Why did I leave?'

Last year, my daughter was in senior kindergarten; she was top of the class. This year she has a teacher who raises her voice, not even yelling, just talks like that. And my daughter can't learn and she can't concentrate. My daughter comes from a background where yelling means violence.

My son is ten. He started peeing himself all over again. My daughter started having problems and they thought she was ADD and wanted to put her on Ritalin. If you knew what was happening, if you looked at kids on Ritalin and knew what was happening, you'd understand.

Women from Strathroy-based Focus Group

My story begins back in the 60s. I called the police. I was very badly beaten. The police talked outside with my husband and the police said, 'What did you do, that this nice man had to beat you this way?' That was the attitude back in the 60s. The next time, I didn't call police; I went to neighbours. Meanwhile my husband began beating my daughter. She told her teacher when she was seven that he was sexually abusing her. She was made a ward of the Crown.

I'm here today because I don't feel things are much better than the 60s. People believe lies quicker than the truth. Why did my ex-husband only get a slap on the hand for everything he did? I'm sick of men getting a slap on the hand. I don't know what can be done about it, but something is wrong with the system and needs to be fixed.

I'll attest to the fact that the police haven't changed. Two or three years ago my husband beat me. I was completely bruised. I nicked him in self-defense. I called the police, and he met the police and said my wife beat me. The two kids were

upstairs crying because they had witnessed it. The officer told him that he would have to leave the house that night. My husband said that officer was consoling him all the way to the police station, saying, 'Obviously, it was her fault.'

After that he didn't physically hurt me, but I endured years of emotional and mental cruelty, until finally I got him out with the help of friends and family.

I was shut down for six years. I was an empty shell. I still did things, but I didn't feel anything.

I'm not in here because of my current partner; it's an ex. I agree with you; police don't help. He stalks me. I know who it is, but without proof police won't do anything. It's an awful feeling. I asked the officer if it would take him running me over or killing me before they would do anything. He called the school and told them that we had moved. My daughter was out of school for two weeks before she could be back in. It's not just me; it's my daughter.

Why aren't women believed?

Men still have all the power. It was my brother-in-law who told him he needed to go.

The judge spoke to me and talked to me about going back to school. He spoke up and said he would take custody and baby-sit while I was in school. The judge said absolutely not, and I felt heard for the first time.

It was my second time in the shelter. I'm on my own in London now. I live in Second Stage. My kids are doing a lot better. Their marks are up and they are into activities.

I was in court in February 2002. I was prepared to be in court on the other side of the aisle. But it was in a small room and he was within arm's length. The other piece is how long the lawyers take. Every time you have to go through it, it opens everything up again. You have to go to London for a lawyer. For the courthouse, you have to go to London.

He had custody every other weekend. I couldn't understand that because of the physical abuse that he did against them. There was a clause that said they [the kids] only had to go when they want to go. I don't want him seeing the layout of the townhouse. He sees it when door is open.

Hockey is seen as a positive thing, but on the way home, his father is talking him down, criticizing him and telling him he isn't good enough. That's the feedback I'm getting. Why do I still have to send them? My son will lose his temper and be mean to the girls.

There were death threats against me and the children and I've had to send the kids [to the abusive ex-partner.]

Even with emotional abuse, I still wanted my kids to have contact with their father, and he spends the day saying I'm a whore and a bitch. He tells my three-year-old that I won't let daddy live there anymore. Who is benefiting from that? The only way to prove emotional abuse is if the kids exhibit signs in school and it can be further investigated.

My situation started at age nine. I was sexually abused by my brother. My parent's best friend's son abused me and then my sister's husband. For four years, I woke up every morning to him in my bed. My parents never believed me when I was growing up. They never believed me in small things like being sick so how could they believe this abuse?

It's hard to come into a place like this and think you are going to be believed when for thirty-seven years you haven't been believed by anyone, even family.

It's like brainwashing the kids. I got a letter yesterday from my thirty-seven-year-old son saying, 'Why can't everyone be happy and get along?' He's still torn apart. Get the kids counselling. Do whatever you have to do [to help the kids].

We have to go to London to get everything done. It stalls everything more.

It's a good thing to know I'm not the only one going through it and people don't just think you're doing it to get attention. It's never happened to some of them, so they don't believe it.

The first thing you think about is physical abuse, not the emotional, mental, the sexual abuse, financial. Shelters need to think of all the forms of abuse.

My husband comes over for hours and talks about all the things I'm not going to be able to buy. And now it's his [support] money too. I'm always going to have to live with his money. He's going to be able to control me with this money thing.

My two sons have been brainwashed to believe there is something wrong with the women in the family.

They don't do it in front of people when they are abusing you emotionally, sexually, and then they don't believe you.

In my case, with my brother sexually abusing me, he was seventeen and I was nine, but I don't remember the actual act. It really hurts not to be believed. My father is an ex-cop and still doesn't believe me years later.

The police didn't lay charges, although they knew he was going to hit me and they wouldn't let us stay in house together, but they didn't lay charges.

The police often grow up in same community as the abusers and they know them.

He has always threatened that he had a weapon in the house, and the police asked if he had a weapon, but he said no and they didn't search.

He accused my son of stealing Tylenol and the police questioned my son about this, but they didn't question him about abusing my son.

Especially if officers have had their own marital problems, they will be more likely to be against women.

In my first relationship, he was sober as a judge when he abused. With my kids' dad, the insults came with being sober and with being drunk.

My husband was always drunk and in some ways he doesn't believe he ever did what he did. It's a good excuse, a real good excuse.

My ex got off because he'd had such a hard life. All the burden was on him; I couldn't do housework or look after the children. He was so hard up. They believed him. It's a wonder the Crown, the judge weren't in tears. They believed him.

I don't know with my ex what his upbringing was, but his dad worked and his mom stayed home. He started out being controlling, but when he got drunk it was worse.

I met my ex fourteen years ago and have gone through hell for twelve. He's left me alone for two, but wants my phone number again. Because of him and his abuse, it dragged me into a hole and I wasn't a good mom to my kids and I lost them to the CAS.

We were split up and he called and said I couldn't wear the short skirt. We were split up and he beat me up. The police brought him back to my place because he had no place to go.

He kept calling and harassing me. I called the police and they said it didn't qualify as harassment. They told me to get a new phone number. I tried to get a restraining order, but couldn't. No lawyers would deal with it.

Transportation is hard. It's hard to get to London for court and for the lawyer. I have to depend on other people to do things for me.

I asked for a restraining order when I left Second Stage, and they said it wasn't necessary because he was following conditions. I found that to be unfair. It's just drawn out for so long; I just gave up. When you have legal aid, they cannot do what a lawyer that you pay for will do. Legal aid paid for \$1,500.00 when I went to court for the kids.

He was put in jail for beating me, but was out in two weeks later. He has done counselling, but it has never been his fault.

I had several charges laid. I caught him in bed with my ex-best friend. He hit me and I broke his nose. I was charged. He was charged, but charges were dropped to drop charges against me. It was a good officer that arrested me. It was the same officer that told me my father had died.

I had a charge laid. The police were not going to lay a charge, but he went to the station and said he had hit me.

I was charged and the Crown wanted to keep me in custody until the trial. They are more willing to put women away than the men.

They want us to speak up, but they don't do anything.

I called the police four times about him driving impaired. I gave a description of the truck, the plate number and where they were going. They didn't charge him.

I called the police once because he was driving drunk. He lost his license for a year. The police told him that I had called. I'm a dead duck if he ever finds out for sure.

Because of fear, the repercussions of doing something like that [calling the police], I don't want to be around when he finds out what I did. I still have the syndrome that I'll be punished if I speak out for myself.

They have a way of making the kids like them.

Have you ever found yourself of making peace at any price? I found that my kids were the same way.

I've got friends that say it couldn't have been that bad.

Al Anon helped me. I needed that program to get through.

They don't worry about anything; they push all the worries onto the women.

I find coming to this place [shelter] has helped me a lot. What we have to concentrate on is ourselves. There are things we can't do anything about. We have

to make sure we don't step back into it. Don't go back into the same relationships. Aren't all men the same? All these men have taken it one step further, but these men are raised like this and are we going to keep doing it?

I saw a comic strip at the Medical Clinic. It was a man with a club and he was going to hit a woman. It came from the paper.

I tried to open a bank account, but couldn't because I didn't have enough assets. A health card with picture ID is not enough. I have a credit card, but still couldn't get an account. This is going to be hard for women coming out of shelters. I hope it's not a new trend.

A legal aid lawyer said that she would not represent me unless my ex had a lawyer. My ex is now representing himself.

I lost the kids for seven months. The guy was arrested. He suffocated my daughter and almost killed her. He was only seventeen and got off. I finally got a copy of his statement. I haven't talked to him since any of this happened. They are watching mom [who has custody of children] for twelve months. I hate cops and I hate CAS workers and I hate men. They said that it was all my fault. And still to this day they think it is all my fault because I didn't see it happening. If I had known, it wouldn't have been happening.

My son is so messed up. He is afraid of Halloween. When things were happening, my ex would put a mask on. My daughter doesn't remember anything. My son remembers being thrown downstairs. He tells me everything that happened to him. He wants to put all the bad guys away. He wants to be a cop.

At first, my son associated me with my ex and didn't want to see me. That was hard. A week after they were taken, my son hated my guts. It was terrible. It took two months for him to trust again. He saw that he was gone and his stuff was gone.

I still think it comes down to whoever can tell the best story. We do have some rogue cops. They grew up here. They work here now. More of us need to get executives and bring more money into the community. We are counted as second class citizens. There is a problem and it's an economic problem.

We are always going to have a problem, and it's an economic problem because we have kids. He will always have that power over us and they will always have that power over us. Unlike my ex, I can't rent a one-bedroom apartment downtown.

The only good thing the CAS has done for my kids is to stop their dad from seeing them. That's because the kids don't want to see him.

About five years ago, I was taking care of my mother-in-law, who was dying at home. It was very tough. He kept complaining. Phone calls kept coming in and he wanted to know who was calling. He hurt himself and was on OSDP. He has never trusted me, sexual things. He has put a pillow over my head until I passed out. He has hit me. I have hit him. My seventeen-year-old has hit me. I had a car. He sold it. He told my daughter I was gone on vacation and wasn't coming home. If it wasn't for his mom, I would have left. He always came out as the innocent person.

I wonder how much of a role the media plays in the things that these men do.

I think the police course they are giving them is lacking something.

I was told not to go to a legal aid lawyer. I was told if you do get a legal aid lawyer, they have to follow certain guidelines and they are not allowed to do certain things. The government is the problem because they pay legal aid.

I had an awesome lawyer. He charged me \$30.00. I had to go out of town for a lawyer.

Babysitting, transportation and money are problems. It's back to I have to rely on someone else for stuff.

I was on OW in Strathroy. I had to reapply in London. They couldn't transfer my file. Each municipality is set up differently.

There are waiting-lists for housing.

There aren't formal support groups. Sometimes we pass out phone numbers. We need a place to hold a group. There is no childcare, even for counselling appointments.

There's not enough babysitting, decent housing or money. Cops suck.

We need a community support worker of our own. We need play areas for kids at services. There is no counselling for children available here. Single mothers don't matter. We end up with people that we trust with our kids, and they abuse our kids and we get blamed. Single mothers get sick. How can they look after the kids?

CAS will be watching you. You are a single parent mother now.

Something has to be done; our needs have to be met. If the government isn't going to do something for us, then we need community workers, volunteers. There has to be a way to advertise this so that people know.

This letter was received from a participant after she attended the London-based focus group

May 11, 2004

Re: London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse

Comments:

I am grateful for the availability of this centre (LAWC.)

I would, however like to see an expansion of the availability of legal advice to these same women.

It seems sometimes like the final insult, or chain reaction of abuse continuing after “escaping” the relationship is for the women who choose to leave to save themselves. They end up losing the most through the legal system.

I left 18 years of every abuse on the power wheel. I left him with the huge house, all its contents and his four vehicles. The children, as was advised to me, would be best left there since the two oldest, 17 and 15 chose to stay and the two youngest, 11 and 9 would need to stay in the environment they have always known with their siblings. I also lost my job, since I worked for the abuser’s family. I also lost my church, my church family, all 29 of my Sunday school students because I should not have left (according to the church’s beliefs) no matter what happened.

So now I am rebuilding my life, seeing the children as much as I can. I still pack all their lunches every week and send them along. I make less than half what the abuser does. He got a \$3,500.00 income tax return because he got to claim all the children, he gets the child tax benefit cheque. I had to pay more income tax. What I spend on the children comes from my pay cheque.

Now I am facing the fact that when all is said and done I will have to pay child support – while he makes more than double me, has countless material possessions, plus a huge house in the country. I will be giving him – the abuser money to maintain his lifestyle.

I would like to see abusers not receive these kinds of rewards for abuse. Child support payments given to people like this means more money in his pocket for his material selfish need.

Thank you for your time.

London-based Focus Group Participant

WHAT TO DO?

“It’s positive that effective community responses have survived and we continue to create new ways of responding. Every movement has ebbs and flows, but the important thing is that good stuff doesn’t die.”

When I set out to write this report, I thought that I would develop recommendations, present them to the advisory committee, go through a few rounds of revisions and come up with some easy-to-follow directions for improvements. But as I was reading and editing your suggestions for recommendations, I realized

In putting these ideas together, I have thought about the theory that we make better decisions collectively than we do individually. The richness of perspective evident throughout this report makes it clear why that would be true. Still collective decision making is a challenging process. Finding a respectful balance of power in our decision making will make it easier to speak to one another and to listen to one another.

As the author of this report, I have just two recommendations;

- Be conscious of power and try to use it respectfully when you are involved in decision making processes.
- Keep talking to each other. You have many creative and insightful ideas and a wealth of experience to compliment them.

This report contains thoughts and observations as they were presented to me. There is a clear consensus that we have to work with each other. The report contains information about how we are doing that and how we might do that in new ways. These are ideas and experiences that ought to give shape to discussions, inform decisions and prompt new processes. These ideas for recommendations have are presented in summary form in the Executive Summary. However, I believe that they carry more passion and vision when they are presented in context. Some of these recommendations are within the purview of those who sit at the tables of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Others are not, but may be brought forward to appropriate policy makers. Not all of the answers are in the recommendations. Many fine analyses and suggestions for moving forward are contained in the thoughts and observations presented throughout this report.

Education and Prevention

We need more coordinated partnerships between community-based services and Education. Then we can realize multidimensional strategies for dealing with the underlying causes. We are going beyond just awareness sessions. What needs to happen is that students must recognize and learn skills and the language for dealing with issues around healthy and unhealthy relationships. For that to be integrated into the classroom and the school culture, there needs to be a translation into educational experiences.

We're moving more towards appreciating how knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours about healthy relationships and understanding violence in relationships can be addressed in various modalities of learning. If you offer multidimensional ways of learning about those areas, you would affect the internalization of the message and the transfer of learning. When they are experiencing this knowledge, skill, behaviour in different contexts, the potential for transfer and integration of learning is greater. It's value driven. It uses a holistic approach; it's both cognitive and emotional.

Make sensitizing students on the issue of sexual harassment part of the curriculum design. Have good lessons and pilot it. You would get a great response and you could incorporate adolescent feedback. When you give it to an educator, the educator will immediately ask, 'Where can I fit this in?' This need is out there and students could benefit from this. We need to develop more programs that will also meet curriculum needs.

When dealing with violence prevention, the first and foremost important thing is the ability to create a relationship with students to talk about topics. You can't make the assumption that teacher training provides that kind of a background. It is critical that programs be scripted and a language be introduced for the teacher doing the program.

We need to have mandatory education at the Teacher College level. Sometimes teachers are learning at the expense of students who are witnessing violence at home. It's not only needed at the teacher level, also the administrator level. This is an important issue and we need to deal with it. The only way to drive the message home is to understand how it impacts on learning; either witnessing or being in a violent relationship.

We need to integrate violence prevention into the goal of good academic achievement. They are not opposing interests. We need to understand how the two endeavours work in tandem and support each other. Children's ability to learn is being impacted negatively because they are witnessing or experiencing violence.

The Ministry of Education gives no money for violence prevention specifically. The Ministry of Education should earmark money and fully fund violence prevention work. The Ministry has a Safe Schools Act, but it is not following through with resources.

Create a course on violence prevention for Althouse [the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario.] Then follow teachers who graduate and study their progress in the classroom and with other colleagues in doing violence prevention work.

Provide funding for [violence prevention] education to girls and boys under sixteen.

We also need to focus on prevention programs in schools, to work with young people. We focus in on serving the victim. There is very little focus on prevention. We could shift some money.

We are opposed to any policy that expels kids from school. Our preference is to work with kids rather than kick them out. There are big barriers for homeless kids in a shelter or trying to live independently after a shelter to get into school. If they can't go to school, they are going to end up in prison.

Family-group conferencing is an alternative way to deal with a suspension program when a serious incident occurs, such as threats, assaults, severe bullying behaviour that we know is a precursor to woman abuse behaviour. In family-group conferencing, you bring together the victim, the perpetrators and the family to try to come to some sort of resolution and reparation. Rather than having the family present, you might have peers present. Peers are often involved in making things happen.

All of this points to the need for encouraging girls to get a good education. We need to work with young people, girls and boys. The socialization that we have been working for is being lost. What we see on TV and in the media has pushed back hard at sexualizing girls and women.

I'm becoming convinced that we are not spending enough time and effort and money in prevention work and on offender treatment work. We need to focus on this area and also on work with abused women and parenting. Focus more efforts on parenting. We can't focus on improving abusive relationships, but we can work with the kids and we can begin to stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse. We need to start educating younger and speaking more to boys, telling them that abusive behaviour is unacceptable. Girls do know that it's unacceptable, but if everyone is doing it, then they think it must be okay.

We need more outreach and public education, starting at a younger age. I see a lot of intergenerational family problems that lead to involvement in Probation and Parole.

We have to get to the children who are witnessing violence. How are we going to deal with making a change for the future?

When they describe their [abusive] relationships, I say that that is not love. It can be very transformative for a woman to hear that.

Women and Their Children

I like the concept of a storefront daycare, where you can drop off your kids and get a break for a nominal fee. You can't expect people to be wonderful parents 24-7 with no relief. The other benefit would be to have women interacting with each other and other kids. Some of them don't have good parenting role models.

Interacting with others who have good parenting skills, they learn. Just being able to see people do things differently is helpful.

Until we can help women feel worthy, they are going to continue to hang out with abusers and losers. It's sad because a lot of women have more than that on the ball. It's just like they are trapped in an economic space and they are trapped in a social space. We know that one of the biggest differentials for children is extracurricular activities and low income kids don't have them. Some money for that would be wonderful, but the same applies for moms. They need be able to do things that get them out of the space they are in.

We need support and respite for families in crisis that can't keep their families together. My vision is a big place where women and their children could go and be supported. There would be health care workers on site, counsellors on site, life skills trainers on site, employment retraining, classrooms, a built-in childcare centre, some support around addictions, parenting programs and women could stay for up to a year. When women are ready to move on, they would mentor new women coming in. It would be part of an understanding that this is the process of living here. It is a place where good relationships can be modelled. Take a little bit of everyone [who provides service] and put them there to provide educational opportunities and opportunities for growth and development for women that have been victimized. Don't let them get lost.

The women who I see who are the most successful at getting out of abuse have friends and support systems and they have financial resources.

Youth

There is a big gap in services for fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds. There is nothing for those kids. Either establish services for this age group or lower the age of intake.

Alternative Service Delivery

Alternative service delivery is the way of the future. Listen to the community to look at how to deliver services effectively and cost-effectively. Ask what would work best in this community?

We should move the workers, as opposed to moving the clients. Put workers in storefront venues downtown in diverse locales. Be more of a drop-in centre with regular hours. Decrease the need to get the client to come in. A good example is N'Amerind. They provide a locale for services to leave messages and they pass on reminders to call. If they get to know you long enough, they will call you pre-crisis before you land up in a mental health facility or jail. The Youth Action Centre plays somewhat of a similar role. Other Community Centres such as LUSO could also play this role of keeping in touch.

We need to get ourselves out more.

Transitional workers in shelters are a very good idea. Give women options; don't extend their stays in shelters.

Only about 13 percent of abused women are accessing shelter and counselling services. That means there are a whole lot of women in the community in need of service that don't want to access residential services. Keeping women safe in their own homes is the way to go. Going into the community and working with women in their homes or in coffee shops or in Community Centres is the way to go. Sometimes, they just want referrals for housing, advocacy with Ontario Works or assistance in getting through any of those systems. And sometimes, it is more than that, and they need help with mental health issues, help accessing legal and housing supports.

Transitional support is the harm reduction approach. It makes more sense for newcomers. They are not going to leave. But they want to know, 'What can you do for me?' The education and programming and supports for children is important. We tell people that we are not about pulling the family apart, but in most of the services we provide, there is no place for the men.

Transitional support can provide service to abused men. It can provide training and consultation to other community services. We can do public education and outreach. The vision is to make Second Stage Housing primarily a transitional support program. Once men find out there is a service there for them, they access it. When we have a man coming to our shelter door, we at least have a place to refer him. Lesbians tend not to use shelter and Second Stage because it outs them. To think people are judged by that is beyond me. But they need alternatives.

What kind of networks do we have locally to support each other? Can we create safe houses? Do we have volunteer drivers to get women to safety? There might be a lot of support for this approach. We need to engage men in this work. Those men do exist in every community. We need to give men an opportunity to reach out to other men to help to keep women safe.

Recreation is very helpful; YMCA and spectrum programs are good. Often stress and financial problems lead to isolation, and recreational programs help to alleviate that. All the other barriers isolate and magnify the problem.

There are not enough community-based programs for the development of healthy families. There are not preventative programs to help families before they get into crisis.

Services need to be more fluid. We need to rethink our services and how we deliver them. We need an on-site woman abuse advocate in every community neighbourhood centre. We need childcare on site and programs that are not stigmatizing. We need a woman abuse advocate in every library.

We need to decentralize things.

Most abused women's primary support and information comes from friends and families. Do more work with the people that surround abused women. Churches are underutilized. There are several faith-based groups that are supportive. Working through them is an option. Build their capacity to support abused women.

We place unrealistic expectations on women who have already been abused. They have a maximum stay of forty-two days in shelter. They have to get through three locked doors and bulletproof glass every time they enter or leave. They are homeless, without money and they are expected to move through in an average of twenty-one days when there is no housing. We expect that they can move out and function and thrive. It is a travesty that we contribute to the devastation of women's souls. Their children are upset; everything is awful. We contribute; we don't stand up and say women and children deserve better. We cannot continue to support this service delivery. Change the paradigm. If we continue to support this, how are men accountable for their behaviour, the stresses and the blame and the shame? This is what we do. We do this. We contribute to this. We are all creative and we need to try to figure out ways to make a patchwork quilt of support. We should be ranting more.

I really believe that we could build a strong community of women and build strong young women. We need more female-owned businesses, more female-centred education, books written and published by women and taught in classrooms. There is a hierarchy amongst women. We do it and build it intentionally. I can function well because I believe in the women that I'm connected with. They will understand me and help me to become a better woman. We need to build community as well as agencies.

A worker that recently retired, we called her the milk and cookies lady, she always talked about the lack of role models. We need mentoring. Training is one thing, but mentoring is different and is needed. You need a 'hook' to get those individuals either in early stages of abusive relationships or now long-term situations. Milk and cookies for children can be a hook. You have to do outreach where individuals are at. You need to identify the opportunities, but you also need to anchor the change. Mentoring is one of the best ways of providing that ongoing support.

Community Centres

Reinstate core funding for Community Resource Centres.

As the City of London looks at plans for expanding Community Centres, ensure that programs that break the isolation for women and other vulnerable members of the community are supported.

The rising costs of programming are not being met by current funding. More and more energy at the Community Centre is going into fundraising. We are neighbourhood-based and don't have a city-wide appeal. Poverty is the big problem. People don't want to be associated with it. How can we package capacity building?

Every neighbourhood should have a neighbourhood centre. The City has a Master Plan that is focused on recreation. It looks at providing large physical structures, but overlooks the needs of the most marginalized.

Aboriginal Communities

In the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, there is part on mutual respect and relationships. It talks about letting aboriginal people take the lead in aboriginal communities.¹⁷

There is a first response team of community volunteers in on the reserve. We could train and support them to respond to woman abuse. They could make decisions about calling the police.

Use At^lohsa as the facilitator of a process to bring appropriate and trusted community members to the table to work on developing community protocols with local police services.

Do the cultural training with police services!

We have to start to resolve grief. They want to hold someone accountable for the pain they feel. In a rage, they strike out.

Diverse Communities

I would also do something culturally geared and culturally specific. Look at high-risk groups. Do work within their belief systems and cultural norms. Don't make them fit the program. It could be something as simple as the time not fitting into community routines or women not being able to come without men. Within some cultures, you don't do icebreakers or focus groups. You have to use other ways to connect.

Canadian models don't always work. You have to be able to adapt your model to meet the needs of other communities. Sometimes there are not resources to adapt and sometimes it's a lack of willingness.

¹⁷ The rebalancing of political and economic power between Aboriginal nations and other Canadian governments represents the core of the hundreds of recommendations contained in this report. Unless accompanied by a rebalancing of power, no progress can be made on other fronts without perpetuating the status quo. The effects of the past will not be undone overnight. (*Volume 5 - Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment. 1 - Laying the Foundations of a Renewed Relationship 1. A New Beginning* http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/skml_e.html)

A person that knows the community will know best how to approach the community.

The value of immigrants working with immigrants is that they have the background understanding of cultural issues.

Immigrant families are often hypersensitive. They have new roles; they have to deal with unfamiliar customs. Men also need support to adapt. There is a whole system to support immigrants to learn language, but they also need support to adapt to new cultural norms. We need to reinforce respect.

If I had the resources, I would set up fun groups. I would not tackle the issue directly. I would talk while they are baking. The groups would serve many purposes; they would break isolation.

Big companies think the cost of interpreting should be built into the cost of their products. We should also build the cost of interpreting into our services.

We need a research paper on the situation of newcomers in London.

The terms of MAROC are to increase access to social services in London to members of diverse and minority communities. It is about developing the policies, working on the plans. The coordinator of MAROC can help to make your agency more open, help with the change process, with tools, videos, models for policies. She helps you to evaluate where you are at.

Coordination

We need to rise above the current situations. We need to reach out in ways that encourage people to work together to ensure that everyone is safe.

When the LCCEWA was established, we looked very different from what we do now. Community agencies like Glen Cairn and LUSO didn't exist. Now there are many families that could benefit from help with family violence.

John Howard was never invited to be part of LCCEWA.

LCCEWA didn't evolve with the times, and see who needed to be involved.

We felt like our work was not validated because we didn't specialize in woman abuse. Sometimes we felt excluded from information sessions and committees.

We have narrowed the definition of abuse and the definition of service for abused women. Sometimes the message seems to be community groups shouldn't be doing this, it's not your expertise. It's very difficult to make a connection. Community work is meant to supplement emergency services.

Indirect work as well as direct work is being done on woman abuse. The LCCEWA feels elitist. Reassess our community. Networking needs to be expanded to work with community-based organizations.

Yes, we would get involved again if there was an opportunity. We see the issue throughout the work of the agency.

It would be helpful for the Community Centre to have a formal connection.

If players and partners could be structured differently, we need to have community players. There are a lot of cultural groups that don't have an agency but have a leader and they need to be at the table as well. We need to develop relationships and intercultural understanding. We can't just take this model and stick it everywhere.

Look at how do we put theory into practice. Sit together and do actual case reviews, from CAS, VAW, police and the Crown. Perhaps also have consumers sitting at the table.

We need not to be so competitive for the dollar. We need to look at what is in the best interests of women.

We could do better at collaboration. The Harris government has really done a number on us, with outcomes and pathologizing. We need to go back to what we know works; women talking to each other and really listening. I don't want stuff to get lost and it feels like it's getting lost.

We should have separate community protocols for woman abuse and sexual violence. There is some overlap, but we are not always dealing with the same problems.

The Early Years Council of London and Middlesex, which includes social services and health workers, is trying to look at issues from children's perspectives, trying to parallel the work of the LCCEWA. No one from the anti-violence sector sits at the table. There are school board people that talk about child witnesses and bullying and dating violence. The issue of woman abuse does come into the room. Either a representative of the LCCEWA or someone delivering direct service to abused women should be a member of the Early Years Council. This could facilitate a reporting relationship that lets each sector know what's important for the other group to know about.

The LCCEWA needs to cultivate relationships with leaders of agencies that have a mandate that goes beyond addressing violence against women. This way those delivering direct services learn the challenges of other organizations and vice versa. Because the LCCEWA is relationship-based, this is important. For the

purpose of learning, it helps to have a team of direct and indirect services representatives.

Longer Term Supports

This is a complex problem and it is intergenerational. I am now seeing the daughters of women who I counselled for sexual abuse. Child abuse destroys the foundation of everything. It will take two generations to heal. Women abuse and child abuse are not separate issues. Women often leave when children are abused. It may be a couple of years after a woman leaves that she uncovers her own abuse. She misses a lot of things developmentally. Invest five or six years of good services into these women to get them education, retraining and sustained counselling. One-stop shopping would help women who are not resourceful. Helpers would see what they need. I really like the idea of positive modelling.

We need longer term services, not forever and not open-ended. But after they have done their work, women need life skills and parenting support. Depending on their inner and outer resources, some can do well with short-term work, but others need longer term support.

Invest in an integrated plan that is three to five years to really make a commitment to support a woman to leave a relationship. And do a longitudinal research study to follow these women. Show that it will work.

Women who have been abused have deep-standing issues that it will take a long time to address. Funders want projects with in-and-out short-term outcomes. We can't meet real needs this way.

Income Support

Economics are the biggest challenge. You can't do anything if you can't pay the bills. If women have their heat turned off and they are at the food bank and they can't get any more food, all the counselling in the world won't help. They have to hook up with another jerk to get the basics. They become very embittered. They become hopeless.

We need to give women help with basic needs and then some social support.

Financial is the bottom layer. If that's not good, then nothing else can happen.

Eliminate the claw-back of the national child tax benefit for women receiving assistance through Ontario Works.

Women on Ontario Works need to apply for support from their ex-spouses. As soon as Ontario Works gets the court order, women are cut off. There is a lack of recognition that abusive partners may not pay. We really need to accept the fact that sometimes our systems don't work. Not all people will comply with expectations.

At Ontario Works, if a woman is having difficulty, it can take her worker a week to get back to her. If I call, the worker gets right back to me. They are not telling the women what they are eligible for. For example, a worker questioned a request for a new bed, telling a woman to get a used one, when she just threw away a bug infested used one. I don't think that's reasonable. Those kinds of challenges are unfortunate. To reinforce the idea that people living in poverty can't expect much is wrong.

Housing

We need geared-to-income housing that is not ghettoized.

Affordable and safe places for women and their children to live just don't exist.

Women who aren't educated and who don't have jobs need affordable housing. When they can't find housing, they end up re-offending or back in the sex industry.

Women come to Second Stage for up to a year. It's not long enough for many women. I thought it was because of dependency, and for some women that is it, and they just need some encouragement, but for others it is not enough time. It's not time to settle legal and custody issues, to find affordable housing near good schools for their kids. One woman recently moved out of Second Stage after three years. It turned out to be the best thing she could have done. When she left she was ready to go and her kids were ready. She was forty. All the things she was able to do in those years makes me want to cry. She got new teeth and was able to smile. A supportive dentist did it for just about one hundred dollars. She had her face smashed in so many times and got such poor health care because she was low income that she had no teeth left. She has a severely disabled child in his twenties. She had programs that had to be set up for him; he went from youth to adult programs. When he left, he was actually saying words. I had never heard him speak before that. She would have ended up back in shelter if she had left sooner. There's a woman that needed the service a little longer. Senior women, I would love to be able to house the senior women we have until they leave this earth.

One of the biggest challenges for women right now is to find safe and affordable housing. They are picky and I tell them they should be. Some women have been told, 'Beggars can't be choosers.' They deserve safe affordable housing near green space and good schools for their kids.

Work

People feel that they want to contribute. It's all or nothing for those on disability or Ontario Works. There are many people who can't do full time work. They are employable part-time or employable with a support person, but they could never work forty hours a week and raise children. Why can't we let people work for fifteen hours a week and supplement their income? It's not going to happen for them. Give encouragement and room to earn small amounts of money and let

them keep it. It would help people with their self-esteem. They would model working for their kids. There needs to be a different way to do things. All or nothing doesn't work.

Recognize abuse as a barrier to work. Provide funding for employment-related supports, for skill development and advocacy and training. Women need pre-employment supports. We also need to fund sensitivity training to staff of employment agencies.

Health Care

Give women in shelters drug benefits and access to birth control, also vouchers for non-prescription drugs for things like Tylenol, cough medicine and calamine lotion. Those gaps are for day to day needs that we take for granted.

Maintain drug cards and bus passes for women even through Ontario Works overpayments.

Provide primary health care in shelters for women. Perhaps set up a residency rotation or nurse practitioner through the Intercommunity Health Centre. This could serve all the shelters collectively. A nurse practitioner could accompany the public health nurse from the Family Abuse Prevention Project.

Provide primary health care via nurse practitioners in Community Centres. There are two groups of women; those in shelters and those in the community. Those in the community are more vulnerable. They are not connected.

Mental Health

We need a woman abuse specialist on mental health teams in the hospital.

We need to work more closely with mental health agencies. More efforts are being made to provide services for women through one agency. Either have staff come to one agency or provide transportation money when that is what a woman needs.

Continue to work with the mental health and addictions sectors to understand the links to woman abuse.

Provide education on trauma to all these sectors. The gap is not sector-specific, and general training would save money. The resources to develop this training do exist within the community.

Training

Provide woman abuse training for maintenance staff and property managers at London Housing.

There is some place for [woman abuse] training in law school, but many law graduates do not do criminal law or family law. It may be useful to have a bar admission course on domestic violence and child sexual abuse. It would be a universal course and there is a captive audience. It would be an overview at best. It may also serve to clue potential lawyers in as to whether or not they are equipped to deal with this.

The local police, despite the good efforts of some people there, don't seem to be able to relate well to diverse cultures and they may not always respond as appropriately as they might.

Reinstate funding for joint Children's Aid Society-Violence Against Women training. Child protection workers are social workers first. This training helps to reinforce the values of the work. It also fosters cooperation, making it easier to work more cooperatively to meet needs of women and kids. The training should have been more available to everyone involved in the Violence Against Women sector. Participation should be determined community by community.

It would be useful to LEADS Employment and Training Centre to do a woman abuse training with staff, to hold a workshop and invite speakers.

Sometimes I think we need to train all front line workers to do a good job with woman abuse, but there is a huge variance between the comfort levels of most people and the specialists. Maybe the best we could do is to get all workers to the point where they are comfortable hearing disclosures and making a referral. There will be some who want to go beyond that.

We have to address that tension between wanting to train other professionals and our feeling of owning 'this paradigm.' Sometimes we don't want anyone else to come in.

Funding

Where is the political will amongst the most powerful? There are some things that will never pay for themselves, but we must do them anyway for the social good.

There is little flexibility around funding mandates. HRSDC funds employment training and doesn't want to recognize that needs are more fluid. There is a compartmentalization of service delivery.

We could learn from private sector institutions without violating our own sense of integrity.

The outcome of these programs in Community Centres is that women are leading healthier lives. It's all about the care that you give for people. You give them emotional support. It is project-funded. It is not core funding. It's a problem that I don't have an area that I can apply to for support of all of this work.

You need to present outstanding outcomes to compete for money. Admin costs are not funded. You are on the hook for what you can really do in the time allotted for the project and you are competing with others who are making bigger claims.

Funders have unrealistic expectations of sustainability after their funding runs out and of volunteer involvement.

Even when partnerships can provide opportunities for low-cost programming, we need to understand the overhead costs of providing space for running the programs.

The issue belongs to everyone. Women are connected to the federal, provincial and municipal governments. All levels of government must play a role in providing support.

Fund easy-to-get, small grants to develop collaborative relationships. Increase administrative lines to allow for the expenses of building collaborative relationships. Recognize the added expenses for rural and small agencies.

When legal aid did a review a few years ago trying to determine where the system should go, it was determined that we need to keep the certificate model. But where are they going? To clinic models. Technically the clinic could represent the abuser and the abused, and the women may not go there if they think there is a chance their partner could go there. It would be a conflict of interest to serve both.

Government

I don't know that putting everything [dealing with woman abuse] in one ministry is the answer, but it could be explored. The other possibility is to create an inter-ministerial committee, not necessarily at the highest level, but including those that are involved in the work. We need a better structure for internal communication.

I am hopeful that the government of the day will shift its perspective to recognize that the majority of victims are female and that the majority of work with victims is about violence against women. When we use the concept of 'victim,' we don't focus enough on the gendered nature of violence. We need to recognize that the majority of clients in the majority of programs for victims are women abused in relationships. We need to tie this to the efforts of the new government to understand woman abuse from a feminist perspective.

There are opportunities for more coordination at the ministerial level. MAG [Ministry of the Attorney General], COMSOC [Ministry of Community and Social Services] and OWD [Ontario Women's Directorate] all do parts, and then there is the work in the criminal justice system. Even ministries have different perspectives on service delivery.

Cities have a lot to do with meeting the needs of the population. In many cities around the world, people don't need transportation. There are small shops for shopping, not malls. Some newcomer seniors have never been to the mall.

Consult with agencies, especially small agencies and those working in rural areas, before flowing new funding to ensure that services will be organized in ways that will optimally meet the needs of the community.

Decision Making

Values are important; we need to understand them. We need to revisit them occasionally.

The biggest challenge is to keep the gains and the accomplishments and to discard what doesn't work. We want everything to stay the same, but it's always about letting go of what doesn't serve human need. We need to get out of reactive mode and we need to set the tone of the work.

If we don't truly represent our own mission, we shouldn't set the agenda.

We need to get time and space away from crisis management for reflection and to think about planning.

We need to maintain viability and integrity without selling out. The VAW sector has to move forward in an innovative way and not just keep replicating what they have always done. When we are always fighting for every dollar, it's hard to think innovatively.

Start with what we have. Everything is slow. We can move forward with real interest and real caring.

We have lost the caring capacity of our society. We need to look at multiple strategies. We must remember where we have come from and what has been accomplished and what is still left to do. Don't let the challenges conquer and divide us in this work.

The number of people needing services outstrips the number of caregiver hours available. More innovative programming could be done if we had time to sit down and think and talk about it.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Respondents

Al Lamont	South West Middlesex Health Centre
Alison Cunningham	Children and Families in the Justice System, London Family Court Clinic
Anne Finnigan	Sexual Assault And Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre
Brenda Mezza	Rotholme
Betty Matos	Support Link
Caroline Kennedy	OPP, Community Service Officer
Cathy Hird	London District Catholic School Board, Secondary School Teacher, Violence Prevention Consultant
Colleen Montgomery	United Way of London & Middlesex
Darlene Ritchie	At^lohsa Native Family Healing Services
Darlene Silverira	Probation and Parole
Derrick Drouillard	CAS Community Group Treatment Program
Eileen McCoy	GAINS Centre
Eleanor Schnall	Judge, Ontario Court of Justice
Estela Quintero	United Way of London & Middlesex
Jacque Carr	Community based Advocate
Jane Arrand	Domestic Violence Coordinator, Middlesex County OPP
Janet Baltessen	LEADS Employment Service
Jennifer Lee	Quest Centre Community Initiatives
Joan Nicol	Parkhill Multi-Service Centre
Joanne Sherin	Family Service London (Community Counselling Program)
Judith Potter	Lawyer
Kate Wiggins	Women's Community House
Kathleen Chapman	Family Law Information Centre
Kathleen Howe	John Howard Society
Katie Moeller	Children's Aid Society
Kim Betteridge	Family Service London in Middlesex County
Kim Davis	Research Coordinator, The Transportation Driving Force Working Group
Laurie Ewing	London Police Service
Lisa Heslop	Family Consultants – Victim Services Unit
Liz Rodrigues	LUSO Community Services
Lori Cunningham	John Howard Society
Lynn Booker Collins	Merrymount Children's Centre

Marg McGill	London Interfaith Counselling Centre and Psychotherapist with a private practice
Maria Loranzo- Perez	LUSO Community Services
Mary-Angela Coderre	LEADS Employment Service
Mary Beth Millar	London East Mental Health Services
Mary Huffman	London Middlesex Health Unit, Family Abuse Prevention Project
Mary Pinder	Probation and Parol
Mary Poore	London-Middlesex Housing Corporation, Community relations worker
Megan Beavers	Victim Services of Middlesex County
Megan Walker	London Abused Women's Centre
Michelle Hurtibuisse	London Intercommunity Health Centre
Michelle Paddon	Changing Ways
Mike Sauer	Across Languages
Michael Stok	Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service
Morella Yopez-Millon	Sexual Assault Centre London and Psychotherapist with a private practice
Mohamed Baobaid	Changing Ways
Mohammed Al-Adeimi	South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, Breaking the Barriers of Isolation in South London
Nicole Johnson	Sexual Assault Centre London
Pam Hill	Heartspace
Petra Taylor	Glen Cairn Community Centre
Ray Hughes	Thames Valley District School Board
Roy Hardy	Ontario Works, Middlesex County
Sandra Daters-Bere	Ministry of Community and Social Services
Susan Macphail	London East Community Mental Health Services, Canadian Mental Health Association
Susan Ralyea	Middlesex-London Health Unit
Tim Kelly	Changing Ways
Tom Drouillard	London Police Service
Vickie Stevens	Search Community Mental Health Services
Wendy Arnott	Women's Rural Resource Centre

Focus Group Participants

Bev Lumsden	Victim Services of Middlesex County
Beverly Leipert	Chair in Rural Women's Health, University of Western
Betty Matos	Support Link
Bonnie Williams	London Interfaith Counselling Services
Carol Roberts	Branch Coordinator for Middlesex County library
Darlene Ritchie	At^lohsa Native Family Healing Services
Dave Morris	Middlesex County CAS
Donna Waterman	Middlesex London Health Unit

Frances Shamley	Community Development Agent for Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Jean Johnson	Director of Middlesex Federation of Agriculture
Joanne Lubansky	Middlesex London Health Unit
Joanne Sherin	Family Services London
Joy Lang	Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children
Kate Wiggins	Women's Community House
Kim Betteridge	Family Service London
Laurie Ewing	London Police Service
Lisa Heslop	Family Consultants, London Police Service
Mary Huffman	Middlesex London Health Unit Family Abuse Prevention Project
Mary Pinder	Probation and Parole
Melissa Nicols	Sexual Assault Centre London
Michelle Paddon	Community Group Treatment Program, Children's Aid Society/Caring Dads Program, Changing Ways
Michael Skok	Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service
Mike Sauer	Across Languages
Nicole Johnson	Sexual Assault Centre London
Roxanne Bail	Family home visitor with Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, Middlesex London Health Unit
Salley Bennet	Middlesex County Community and Social Services, Ontario Works
Thelma Perry	Women's Institute
Teri Allen	Strathroy General Hospital
Tim Kelly	Changing Ways
Valerie Clark	Middlesex County Library
Wendy Arnott	Women's Rural Resource Centre
10 women	Participated in a Strathroy based focus group
12 women	Participated in a London based focus group