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EMPOWER

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Acknowledging Intimate Partner Violence in Men

The Men's Centre, with support from Vancouver Island Health Authority, recently created the "[Intimate Partner Violence: Men Leaving Violence Safety Planning Toolkit](#)." This toolkit highlights how intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic abuse can present to men. The guide offers information on practical safety tips, helpful resources for identifying IPV, and understanding IPV in minority men, such as those who are LGBTQ+ and Indigenous men.

The knowledge and discussion of domestic violence and abuse against men is sparse. Generally, women are more likely than men to experience physical violence. Regardless, men can and do experience physical violence and abuse. Statistics Canada reported that the rate of [IPV experienced by men increased 19% from 2018 to 2023](#).

However, a [report](#) commissioned by the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC), found that men are also far less likely to report abuse and seek out mental health treatment due to the stigmatization of mental health and violence among men. Societal standards of traditional masculinity can discourage men from disclosing abuse because it is oftentimes perceived as “weak.” As well, the stigmatization is further exacerbated by the lack of male-centric resources and services for male victims of IPV. [Both police and risk assessment tools tend to assume the victim is a woman and take female perpetrators less seriously compared to their male counterparts](#). Because of this, there is a general lack of awareness surrounding men’s experiences, causing it to be consistently underestimated and downplayed.

In April 2021, the first family shelter for fathers and children opened in Toronto. The [Canadian Centre for Men and Families](#) is a mental health and social service hub to empower and advocate for men in a supportive and inclusive environment. The [CCMF’s family shelter](#) is the first of its kind in Ontario, offering emergency accommodations and support—whether it is counseling, food and clothing, or child care needs—for men experiencing domestic abuse.

The Men’s Centre (TMC) is a British Columbia-based non-profit that works to empower men to be healthy and fulfilled individuals, partners, and fathers through supportive relationships and making positive contributions to their communities. They provide accessible counseling, coaching, and workshops to men in the Nanaimo, BC area. For more information, you can visit their [website](#) or contact TMC at info@themenscentre.ca or +1 (250) 716-1551.

Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime Launches Survey for Survivors of Sexual Assault

The Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) introduced a new [survey](#) as part of a national investigation into sexual assault. This investigation began with 75 individual survivor interviews and conversations with more than 200 stakeholders. The survey, which is anonymous and confidential, seeks to remove systemic barriers, better address victim’s needs, and improve access to justice for victims of sexual assault. All the questions listed on the survey are optional and anyone completing the survey can choose to skip over questions or stop at any point.

The survey focuses on giving victims a chance to have their voices heard, with Dr. Benjamin Roebuck, Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime, stating that it was “an important way to amplify survivor voices, especially for those who may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences publicly.” With this survey, OFOVC aims to better understand the unique barriers survivors face when navigating the legal system and to advocate for meaningful changes that meet victim’s needs and respect their rights.

Hoori Hamboyan, OFOVC’s lead investigator, emphasized the importance of having survivors participate in this survey and encouraged individuals to share it widely. Hamboyan hopes that with broad participation, the survey will be able to capture a range of experiences and intersectional challenges faced by a diverse group of survivors.

To learn more about the OFOVC’s investigation, visit [Systemic Investigation - Survivors of sexual assault](#). For anyone in Canada who believes their rights under the [Canadian Victims Bill of Rights](#) have not been respected, they can contact the Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime at victimfirst@ombud.gc.ca or at 1-866-481-8429.

Victims of Crime in Quebec at a Loss

In 2021, the Province of Quebec introduced new limitations on financial assistance to victims and survivors of crime provided by the [Indemnisation des Victimes d’Actes Criminels \(IVAC\)](#), and victims will soon feel its large effect. The adoption of [Bill 84](#) in 2021 eliminated the possibility of lifetime payments. Section 51 caps the period of financial assistance to a maximum period of three years. Now, in 2024, Quebec victims and their families are confused and concerned about how they will be able to support themselves.

While there are few legal avenues available to challenge the law, survivors who are affected and looking for support can join a Facebook group called “[Victimes abandonnées par IVAC](#).”

The IVAC program works to provide financial assistance and support to victims of crime and their families to help them overcome any physical, psychological, or financial barriers and consequences that were a result of the crime they experienced or witnessed.

However, Bill 84 also abolished the list of eligible criminal offences and **expanded their definition** of “victims of crime” to include all crimes covered in the *Criminal Code*. As a result, a wider range of victims and survivors will be able to access necessary assistance. This also includes Quebec residents who are victims of a crime that occurred outside of the province.

The bill also increased the timeframe from two to three years so that victims of crime can continue to apply for assistance. For those who were victims of violent crime during childhood, this period does not apply and an application can be filed at any time.

Survivors and victims can contact IVAC [here](#) and visit their [website](#) for more information.

Murder of Nova Scotia Woman Calls Attention to Family Violence Risk for Older Canadians

The murder of a 71-year-old woman by her male partner in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia has brought attention to the prevalence of family violence among Canadians aged 65 and older. An RCMP investigation that began on November 4th determined the man killed his female partner, and that he died from self-inflicted injuries. While both the victim and perpetrator have not been identified due to privacy concerns, authorities were able to establish that the murder was an act of intimate partner violence (IPV).

Family violence against seniors has increased substantially in recent years, with Statistics Canada **reporting** that the rate of police-reported family violence reached 94 victims per 100,000 population in 2023. This increase represents the highest level since this data first became available in 2009. In 2023, women aged 65 and older made up 57% of victims in familial violence cases and were more likely to be victimized by a spouse than any other type of family member. These disturbing trends highlight how the nationwide increase in IPV impacts women and girls of all ages.

Katreena Scott, who runs the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at Western University, calls for more attention to the heightened risks that seniors face. In an interview with **CTV**, Scott explained how older adults face unique risks for violence, citing how retirement can leave an individual isolated from resources they may have had access to in their workplace. This social isolation can leave them more vulnerable to violence and in a position where they are unable to get the help they need. Scott urges Canadians to be aware of the indicators of familial and intimate partner violence, recognizing warning signs such as a history of violence in relationships, or behaviours like paranoia and obsessiveness to prevent victimization before it can occur.

CRCVC's **January 2024** issue of EMPOWER discussed how IPV and gender-based violence (GBV) continue to affect thousands of victims each year. In 2023 alone, a woman or girl was murdered in Canada on average every 2.5 days, with violence increasing during times of crisis such as during natural disasters and due to financial hardship. As these trends continue to impact women and girls across Canada, it is important to identify signs of IPV and GBV as they occur and to spread awareness to prevent more individuals from being victimized.

Ontario Criminal Cases Increasingly Ending Before Seeing Trial

Delays across courts in Ontario are continuing to plague the justice system, resulting in a growing percentage of cases ending with a withdrawal or stay of charges. This dramatic shift began in 2020, with Statistics Canada **reporting** that the percentage of cases ending in a guilty verdict dropped from 53% to 42% between the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 fiscal years. In the 2022/2023 fiscal year, the latest fiscal year of data collected, the percentage of cases that concluded with a withdrawal or stay of charges climbed to nearly 56%, reaching a 10-year record.

The increase in cases being withdrawn or stayed has been attributed to several factors, including backlogs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of resources across the court system. According to the principles set out by the Supreme Court in *R v Jordan*, an individual accused of a crime must be tried within 18 months for cases going to trial in provincial court and 30 months for cases going to trial in superior court. If a trial fails to be concluded during this period, barring exceptional circumstances, it is determined that a violation of the defendant's Charter section 11 (b) rights has occurred.

The delays in the court system have seen a growing number of cases fail to see completion at trial. Emily Quint, a survivor of sexual assault, was unable to receive justice as the charges against the man accused of attacking her were stayed as a result of multiple delays. “The whole process was horrific,” said Quint while speaking to **CBC**, “There was so much anger, so much sadness. It was like, ‘Who can I contact? What can I do? This can't be the end’”. Unfortunately, Quint is not the only person unable to find justice.

Per the Ministry of the Attorney General, 2023 saw a record 59 sexual assault cases stayed due to trial delays in Ontario, the most per year since the *Jordan* time limit came into force.

To address these problems, the Attorney General of Ontario announced earlier this year the Government of Ontario will invest \$29 million to appoint a minimum of 25 new judges to the Ontario Court of Justice and hire 190 more Crown prosecutors, victim support, and court staff. Despite the increase in funding, Donna Kellway, president of the Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association, believes there is still more work to do. Kellway maintains that to fix the justice system and ensure viable charges make it to trial before hitting the time limit set out by the *Jordan* ruling, even more Crown prosecutors, judges, court staff and courtrooms are required than the \$29 million investment would provide.

Victims' Families Barred from Attending Paul Bernardo Parole Hearing

On November 19th, the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) **denied the families of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy permission to attend** Paul Bernardo's, a notorious Canadian serial killer and rapist, parole hearing and deliver their victim impact statements in person, citing safety and security concerns. According to **section 4(d) of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*** the PBC can restrict attendance if "the security and good order of the institution [...] is likely to be adversely affected by the person's presence."

In a letter to PBC chair Joanna Blanchard, Correctional Service of Canada commissioner Anne Kelly, and Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc, the families' lawyer Tim Danson argued that **French and Mahaffy's families have the right to address their daughters' killers in person**. Danson asserted that delivering victim statements in person brings an "overarching human dimension and quality" to the proceeding. He further elaborates, "Relegating victims, against their will, to the impersonal, detached coldness of a computer screen is simply cruel. The fact that the 'system' fails to understand this is profoundly sad."

After the victims' families voiced their concerns, the **PBC retracted its decision** and is working to allow the families to attend Bernardo's parole hearing to deliver their victim impact statements. The federal ombudsperson for victims of crime, Dr. Benjamin Roebuck, said in a **statement** that victims' preferences about attending a hearing in person or virtually are considered, but not guaranteed. Danson, who has represented the families for nearly three decades, has **requested that the hearing be adjourned to a later date** to allow for the families to travel to attend in person.

In May 2023, Bernardo, a designated dangerous offender, was moved from the maximum-security Millhaven Institution in Ontario to the medium-security La Macaza Institution in Quebec, sparking outrage from Canadians. Citizens and government officials alike denounced the move, with Danson releasing a **statement** arguing that the decision was not holistic and risked retraumatization to the families of the victims. However, a **Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) report** reveals that Bernardo's security level was assessed 14 times between 1999 and 2002, each producing a score that recommended medium-security classification. The score was overridden by his status as a high-profile inmate.

As of November 26th, Bernardo has been **denied parole for a third time**. Family members of French and Mahaffy provided their **victim impact statements** both in person and virtually, detailing their lived experiences as a result of Bernardo's murder and assault of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy.

Upcoming Events

Homicide Support Group

Our Homicide Support Group is for family members, friends, and close loved ones of homicide victims and is intended to offer peer support to those dealing with violent loss. This support group is offered nationally meaning that we can connect with and support survivors from across the country. *English only.*

When: 6:30 pm EST January 30th, 2024

Where: Virtually

To RSVP: Email us at crcvc@crcvc.ca or call us at 1-877-232-2610



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