



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

ABUSE IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS

Violence against women is the leading cause of women's homelessness in Canada. Every year, violence and abuse drive over 100,000 women and children out of their homes and into emergency shelters. Many more - often young women - never make it to shelter at all. They live on the streets of our cities, in poverty and exposed daily to sexual harassment and violence.

WOMEN LIVING ON THE STREET ARE HIGHLY VULNERABLE

Without a roof over their heads and a door to lock safely behind them, women are at great risk of physical, emotional and psychological harm. Women living on the streets of Canadian cities are highly vulnerable and re-traumatized by their difficult everyday lives. For women, street homelessness is a virtual guarantee of being raped. Many street-involved women are abuse and trauma survivors struggling with resulting mental health and addiction issues. Yet, there is a severe shortage of detox beds dedicated to women, and street-focused programs specifically for women are few and far between.

600 ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARE MISSING OR HAVE BEEN MURDERED

Through Sisters in Spirit, the Native Women's Association of Canada has documented almost 600 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The magnitude of this violation and loss is incalculable, and it is not unconnected to women's homelessness. By failing, as a nation, to ensure no woman has to live on the street in Canada, we have left women vulnerable to murder. It is long past time that Canadian governments, at all levels, declared women's street homelessness unacceptable and responded with effective, coordinated programs.

A CRISIS FOR WOMEN NORTH OF 60

Women's homelessness in Canada's northern territories is a crisis. Rates of violence experienced by women in the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are almost double rates in Canadian provinces. Rates of shelter use per capita are much higher in the territories than in southern Canada. A single day study showed shelter use in Nunavut 10 times higher than in any province. One shelter worker in Iqaluit estimated there were 150 homeless women in a population of just over 6,000 people - almost 6% of the female population. Housing is in such

short supply that every woman is vulnerable to homelessness and women in abusive relationships live at the mercy of partners who can force them out of their homes.

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES NEED ACCESSIBLE SHELTERS

Despite experiencing great vulnerability and high rates of abuse, women with disabilities are unable to access many shelters set up to serve women fleeing violence. One third of violence against women (VAW) shelters don't have an accessible bathroom, less than a quarter offer specialized services for women who are Deaf or hearing impaired and less than 20% have services for blind or visually-impaired women. For their safety, women with disabilities need to be able to access emergency shelter across Canada, and shelters need funding to support accessibility accommodations.

WOMEN NEED SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING: A NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

The federal government, in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments, needs to develop and implement a comprehensive, women-inclusive National Housing Strategy with Emergency, Second Stage and Permanent Housing for women. Inuit, First Nation, Métis and urban Aboriginal women and their organizations should lead development of sectoral housing strategies for their populations within the National Housing Strategy. The strategy needs to address the gaps in emergency shelter and transition housing for women in the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and ensure access to shelter for women with disabilities and rural women.

CONNECTING THE NUMBERS:

Annual sexual assault rate of women living on the street in Toronto: 20%

Average length of time on the street for a woman in Toronto: 3-4 years

Cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women documented by Sisters in Spirit: 582

Number of VAW shelters in Canada: 569

Annual costs of violence against women in Canada: \$4.7 billion

Rate of spousal violence experienced by women in the 3 territories: 12%

Rate of spousal violence experienced by women in the 10 provinces: 7%

Rate of spousal violence experienced by women in Nunavut: 28%

Shelters without one building entrance that is wheelchair accessible: 25%

Shelters without wheelchair accessible bathrooms: 35%

Shelters without wheelchair accessible bedrooms: 35%

Shelters with specialized services for women who are Deaf or hearing impaired: 22%

Shelters with specialized services for women who are blind or visually impaired: 17%

Rate of shelter use in Nunavut on a single day as a multiple of the highest use in a province: 10 times

Sources: Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, *You Just Blink and It Can Happen: A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60*, YWCA Canada, November 2007. Jane Taber, *In defence of 'awesome minister' Helena Guergis*, Globe and Mail, April 13, 2010 Native Women's Association of Canada, *What Their Stories Tell Us - Research findings from the Sisters In Spirit initiative*, 2010 http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/imce/2010_NWAC_SIS_Report_EN.pdf. Native Women's Association of Canada, <http://www.nwac-hq.org/programs/sisters-spirit>, 2010. Sistering and Street Health, *Women's Homelessness Bulletin*, June 2008. Statistics Canada, *Transition Homes in Canada: National, Provincial and Territorial Fact Sheets 2007/2008*. Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*. Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2009002/article/10845/tbl/tbl7-eng.htm>, 2009