

# WOMANACT CONSULTATION ON THE TORONTO POLICE SERVICE BOARD: 2025-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

*August 7th, 2025*

RESEARCH & POLICY



WomanACT



## Acknowledgement

The development of WomanACT's feedback to the Toronto Police Service Board: 2025–2028 Strategic Plan has been a collaborative effort grounded in the lived experiences, expertise, and advocacy of our members, partners, and community stakeholders. We extend our deep gratitude to the frontline organizations, researchers, advocates, and survivors who contributed their insights, time, and knowledge to inform this work.

This package reflects a collective effort to center survivor voices and provide recommendations rooted in gender-based and trauma-informed approaches. Led by WomanACT, the development of this resource involved consolidating insights from frontline organizations, survivors, researchers, and advocates across the violence against women (VAW) sector to answer the Toronto Police Service Board's consultation questions.

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our partners—representing diverse sectors, communities, and lived experiences—who helped shape this resource. Their input is instrumental in strengthening gender-responsive, equitable, and accountable public safety strategies.

## Endorsements

Abode Community Service Centre, Organization WomanACT Member  
Abrigo Centre, Organization WomanACT Member  
Aura Freedom International, Organization WomanACT Member  
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, Organization WomanACT Member  
Chloe Sloan, Individual WomanACT Member  
Elizabeth Fry Toronto, Organization WomanACT Member  
Ernestine's Women's Shelter, Organization WomanACT Member  
Interval House, Organization WomanACT Member  
IQ Business Events Inc., Organization WomanACT Member  
KCWA Family and Social Services, Organization WomanACT Member  
North York Women's Centre, Organization WomanACT Member  
Oasis Centre Des Femmes, Organization WomanACT Member  
Sistering A Woman's Place, Organization WomanACT Member  
West Neighbourhood House, Organization WomanACT Member  
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, Organization WomanACT Member  
Women's Hostels Inc./Nellie's, Organization WomanACT Member  
YWCA Toronto, Organization WomanACT Member

## Background

For over two decades, WomanACT has been a leader in the fight against gender-based violence. As a charitable organization, we work with community groups, governments, the private sector, and survivors to promote gender equity through research, policy, and education.

WomanACT's written submission to the Toronto Police Service Board (TPSB) in November 2024 highlights five critical areas for reform: (1) gender-responsive and trauma-informed policing; (2) integrated crisis response models that include non-police alternatives; (3) improved accountability, transparency, and equity in the use of data and performance measures; (4) meaningful community partnerships rooted in survivor leadership; and (5) strengthened internal practices within the TPSB to support workforce diversity, wellness, and anti-oppression.

WomanACT has consulted – both as a member of the City's IPV Working Group and independently – to provide survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and evidence-based recommendations to address the TPSB response to the rising rates of intimate-partner violence (IPV).

The development of the Toronto Police Service Board's 2025 – 2028 Strategic Plan presents a key opportunity to align the Board's priorities with the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector's long-standing calls for meaningful change. Guided by the Community Safety and Policing Act (2019) and the Board's own Strategic Plan Policy, the 2025–2028 Plan is intended to set the priorities, objectives, and performance measures that will define how policing contributes to safety and well-being across Toronto. This plan can help shape a policing approach that is responsive to the diverse needs of survivors and focused on preventing IPV and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).



## Our Approach

TPSB's new strategic plan presents an opportunity to reimagine safety in ways that honour IPV/GBV survivors and victims' experiences and embed equity at the core. Doing so requires intentional listening, collaboration, and action. Survivors of gender-based violence often face barriers to safety and justice, not just from their abusers, but from systems meant to protect them.

Building on WomanACT's written submission to the Toronto Police Service Board in November 2024, our current engagement aims to amplify the voices of VAW partners, survivors, advocates, and academics within the strategic planning process. **This document offers concise, community-informed summaries and actionable insights to answer discussion questions raised by TPSB. It highlights various literature to identify recommendations put forth by VAW organizations and those aligning entities. It also maps how each question aligns with TPSB's Guiding Principles outlined in their 2025–2028 Strategic Plan Update.**



## TPSSB Strategic Priorities and Guiding Principles

Source: Toronto Police Service Board 2025-2028 Strategic Plan Presentation



### How adequate and effective policing will be provided to meet local needs

#### Relevant Questions:

- What are the most common concerns women express about engaging with police during or after domestic violence incidents?
- Where do you see gaps in how police respond to domestic violence?
- Is there usefulness in an ongoing dialogue and how might that be done? What would it look like?
- How can the Service and the Board best support addressing the IPV epidemic more broadly?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Human rights and equity-centred
- Upstream approaches,
- Transparency and accountability



### Objectives, priorities and core functions of the police service

#### Relevant Questions:

- Where do you see gaps in how police respond to domestic violence?
- Are there challenges in the courts that impact TPS services and processes?
- How can we better understand and manage cross charging?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Evidence-based
- Human rights and equity-centred



### Qualitative and quantitative performance indicators and outcomes

#### Includes indicators:

- the provision of community-based crime prevention initiatives, community patrol and criminal investigation services,
- community satisfaction with the policing provided
- violent crime and clearance rates for violent crime
- police assistance to victims of crime and re-victimization rates

#### Relevant Questions:

- How can we make our handling of domestic violence cases more transparent?
- What kind of data collection is important to the sector?
- Where do you see gaps in how police respond to domestic violence?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Evidence-based
- Transparency and accountability

Source: Toronto Police Service Board 2025-2028 Strategic Plan Presentation



### Information technology, police facilities, and resource planning

#### Relevant Questions:

- What kind of data collection is important to the sector?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Evidence-based
- Transparency and accountability



### Overview of consultations done and how needs/concerns raised have been addressed

#### Relevant Questions:

- Is there usefulness in an ongoing dialogue and how might that be done? What would it look like?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Evidence-based
- Transparency and accountability



### Interactions with communities (i.e.. person who appear to have a mental illness or neurodevelopmental disability, First Nation, Inuit and Metis and racialized communities)

#### Relevant Questions:

- Which groups in our community might feel especially unsafe or unsupported when dealing with police (e.g., racialized women, migrants, LGBTQ+)? Why?
- What are the most common concerns women express about engaging with police during or after domestic violence incidents?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Human rights and equity-centred,
- Upstream approaches



### Reporting on implementation and performance objectives in the annual report

#### Relevant Questions:

- Are there challenges in the courts that impact TPS services and processes?
- How can the Service and the Board best support addressing the IPV epidemic more broadly?

#### TPSSB Guiding Principles:

- Evidence-based,
- Upstream approaches



# 1. What are the most common concerns women express about engaging with police during or after domestic violence incidents?

*In 2019, approximately 80% of individuals who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) did not report it to police, with women reporting only 22% of the time.*

Reluctance to engage with police is often rooted in fear of repercussions or the belief that the abuse will not be taken seriously—particularly when it is non-physical or non-sexual in nature. Many women report that police minimize their experiences, ask accusatory questions, or fail to recognize signs of coercive control, especially in the absence of visible injuries. Survivors also worry about the involvement of child protection services, being judged for remaining in the relationship, or, depending on their immigration status, risking their ability to stay in Canada. These fears are often compounded by past negative experiences with law enforcement, including being disbelieved, blamed, or treated dismissively.

Distrust of police is especially pronounced among marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, immigrant women, and members of 2SLGBTQI+ communities, who frequently face systemic discrimination and a lack of accountability from police services. There is also widespread fear that police involvement could provoke retaliation or escalation by the abuser. This risk is heightened when safety plans are inadequately implemented after a survivor seeks support, leading to further harm and often resulting in disengagement from services.

Mandatory charging policies further complicate these dynamics, as they can lead to the arrest of both parties without a proper assessment of the context, particularly in cases involving self-defence, coercive control, or fear of reprisal. Dual arrests and misidentification of the primary aggressor are common outcomes, especially when officers lack trauma-informed training. As a result, many women, especially marginalized women, may be deterred from seeking help, fearing that police involvement will worsen their situation rather than provide protection. Language barriers further limit access to support, particularly when services are not available in the survivor's preferred language.



## Recommendations in Literature

1

### **Rage and Despair**

*Canadian feminist lawyer and women's advocate*

**Ensure meaningful investigations of police conduct, and improve transparency and support for victims to restore trust and encourage reporting, to prevent further tragedies.**

Highlights that many women who experience intimate partner abuse are reluctant to call the police due to a variety of fears and systemic barriers. These include concerns about escalating violence, involvement of child protection services, racialization or Indigenous status of their partners, immigration risks, and prior negative experiences with law enforcement. Women are often blamed for not reporting abuse, yet only about 25% do so, partly because abuse may not always be physical or criminalized. The article also points out that police and criminal systems are not held accountable for their failures in responding appropriately to intimate partner abuse, which further discourages women from seeking help. This systemic failure can lead to tragic outcomes and undermine trust in law enforcement among victims.

2

### **What does Mandatory Charging mean**

*Ontario Women's Justice Network*

**Reassess the automatic laying of charges in domestic violence cases and ensure that policies better reflect the gendered realities of abuse. Ongoing training for justice system actors is also essential to understand the complex dynamics of domestic violence and to avoid re-victimizing survivors.**

Many women fear retaliation from their abusers if charges are laid, which may discourage them from calling the police even when their safety is at risk. Women in single-income households worry about losing financial support if their abuser is charged or imprisoned. Additionally, immigrant women or those with immigrant partners may avoid involving police due to fears of deportation, despite policies intended to protect immigration status. Mandatory charging can often have unintended consequences, including the criminalization of survivors through dual charges.





3

### **Intimate partner violence**

*Government of Canada , Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)*

**A comprehensive, policing-centered set of recommendations and strategies that emphasize criminal law reform (particularly regarding coercive control), proactive information sharing (Disclosure Schemes), trauma-informed and standardized police response (Risk Assessment and Training), dedicated IPV units, and coordinated offender management.**

Common reasons for not reporting include viewing the abuse as a private matter, perceiving the incident as not serious enough, fear of stigma or shame, fear of court intervention, and lack of trust in the criminal justice system. Additional barriers include language difficulties and concerns related to immigration status that prevent victims from seeking help. Indigenous women face unique challenges such as limited access to culturally appropriate resources, inaccessible support services, distrust of law enforcement, and fears about confidentiality in the justice system. Furthermore, 34% of victims do not disclose the violence to anyone, further hindering access to support and reporting.

4

### **METRAC Action on Violence**

*METRAC*

**Building safer communities through education, prevention, and innovative tools such as Safety Audits to address violence against women and youth. They emphasize the importance of changing ideas, actions, and policies to improve justice and equity, and encourage public engagement to promote safety and better responses from institutions, including law enforcement.**

Many survivors of violence, especially women and youth, face the challenge that police and other authorities often do not take their reports seriously. For example, 28 percent of respondents in a 2014 survey expressed a belief that police would downplay or dismiss their reports of abuse. Additionally, fewer than 10% of sexual assaults were reported to the police, highlighting a significant lack of confidence in law enforcement's ability or willingness to address such crimes effectively.



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## **Criminalization of Women Forum**

*Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic (along with United Way Greater Toronto, Status of Women Canada, Gender Equality Network Canada)*

**The report recommends reviewing mandatory charging policies to better consider the complex realities of women who are victims of domestic or sexual violence, ensuring police consult with Crown attorneys before laying charges in family violence situations and take into account trauma and ongoing abuse. It calls for increased training for police, service providers, and Crown attorneys on gender-based violence and trauma, as well as the creation of diversion or counseling programs tailored to women charged with family violence offenses. Additionally, the report emphasizes expanding access to legal representation and community-led support services rather than incarceration, alongside improving public education on sexual assault. These reforms aim to prevent the criminalization of women survivors and provide them with appropriate, trauma-informed responses and support.**

Explores how women survivors of gender-based violence are often criminalized, especially in contexts involving intimate partner violence, family law, and immigration. It highlights how systemic biases—such as racism, colonialism, and poverty—intersect to disproportionately affect marginalized women.



## 2. Where do you see gaps in how police respond to domestic violence?

There are multiple, critical gaps in how police respond to domestic violence, which often stems from a lack of resources, training and trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches. One of these gaps is that assessment tools often fail to capture the full context of abuse, particularly when violence is non-physical. Forms of coercive control—such as surveillance, manipulation, and financial abuse—are frequently overlooked. Additionally, current assessments rarely take into account a survivor’s history with the abuser or critical intersectional factors like race, immigration status, disability, or language barriers, all of which shape risk and access to support.

Another gap lies in the lack of trauma-informed and culturally responsive policing. Many officers are not trained to recognize non-visible forms of abuse or to respond in ways that center survivor safety and dignity. As a result, survivor experiences—especially those of Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals—are often minimized, disbelieved, or dismissed altogether. This contributes to deep mistrust and underreporting within marginalized communities.

A lack of coordination between police and community services further limits effective response. Survivors often fall through the cracks due to fragmented relationships between law enforcement and supports such as shelters, counseling services, and child protection agencies. Without collaborative planning and shared information, survivors will often disengage due to safety and fear.

Survivors report that navigating protection order laws is nearly impossible due to inconsistent enforcement, excessive complexity, and high costs. A tragic consequence of these systemic failures is reflected in the statistic that 75% of intimate partner violence (IPV) homicides occurred after perpetrators breached existing protection orders, pointing to serious flaws in enforcement and prevention.

Additionally, Police responses to domestic violence vary widely depending on the officer, with some showing compassion and others minimizing the abuse or blaming the victim.



## 2. Where do you see gaps in how police respond to domestic violence?

Concerns also arise when police officers themselves are perpetrators of gender-based violence. In such cases, internal investigations often lack transparency and impartiality, which continues to protect officers from accountability and further erodes survivors trust in police services.

Finally, there remains a significant disconnect between official policy and on-the-ground practice. Although a policy states that charges should be laid based on reasonable grounds regardless of a survivor's willingness to participate, this is not consistently applied. Black women and other marginalized survivors continue to experience racial profiling, wrongful charges, and systemic bias, exposing deep flaws in police culture and reinforcing barriers to safety and justice.





## Recommendations in the Literature

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### **Understanding coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence in Canada: How to address the issue through the criminal justice system?**

*Carmen Gill. Mary Aspinall*

**Create a new coercive control offense in the Criminal Code of Canada to address the patterned nature of intimate partner violence, moving beyond the current incident-based approach.**

This requires establishing a legal test for coercive control, potentially drawing from the UK's framework, and developing new risk assessment tools and specialized training for police officers to identify and respond to non-physical forms of abuse. Furthermore, a multi-level task force involving judicial personnel and experts, along with a federal/provincial/territorial working group and broader stakeholder consultations, is crucial to implement these changes across the entire justice system.

The Canadian criminal justice system currently lacks a comprehensive understanding and adequate resources to effectively address coercive control in intimate partner violence. While the government acknowledges coercive control as a dynamic of abuse, there is no specific Criminal Code offense for it, meaning the system largely focuses on isolated incidents of physical violence rather than the ongoing, cumulative harm of controlling behaviors. This deficiency in legal framework and specialized training makes it incredibly difficult for law enforcement to intervene appropriately, often failing to recognize and prosecute the subtle yet pervasive tactics used to strip victims of their freedom. Although recent amendments to the Divorce Act consider coercive control in family law matters, this progress has not yet translated into necessary changes within the Criminal Code, highlighting a significant gap in the criminal justice response.

The ultimate goal is to fundamentally shift how the criminal justice system perceives and responds to intimate partner violence, recognizing the pervasive harm of ongoing control.



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**National Framework for Collaborative Police Action on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

*Canadian Observatory on the Justice System's Response to Intimate Partner Violence, CACP Crime Prevention and Community Safety and Well-being Committee*

**Develop comprehensive, collaborative strategies involving police, community partners, and victim support services to improve prevention, risk assessment, victim safety planning, and offender accountability.**

There are significant gaps in police responses to IPV and domestic violence, including inconsistent practices, lack of coordinated multi-agency approaches, limited training, and insufficient incorporation of survivor voices and trauma-informed methods. Key barriers faced by individuals accessing support include systemic service gaps, fragmented roles between agencies, risk management challenges, and social or cultural obstacles that inhibit victims from engaging with services or police. Addressing these barriers involves building trust between sectors, clarifying responsibilities in risk management plans, and adopting evidence-based, survivor-centered practices to enhance safety and well-being. The framework shows the ongoing need for continuous training, community engagement, and knowledge sharing to close these gaps and promote effective, compassionate police responses to IPV.

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**Coercive control and risk in intimate partner violence: are Canadian police prepared to assess?**

*Mary Aspinall, Carmen Gil, Myrna Dawson & Marie-Marthe Cousineau*

**Provide enhanced, ongoing training for officers at all levels to improve understanding of coercive control, alongside the development of comprehensive risk assessment tools that include indicators of non-physical abuse.**

Canadian police officers primarily focus on physical violence when responding to intimate partner violence (IPV), often overlooking coercive control and non-physical abuse due to limitations in existing training, legislation, and risk assessment tools. Many common risk assessment instruments require evidence of physical violence, which downplays crucial aspects like emotional abuse and control, resulting in gaps in police recognition and intervention. As Canada considers criminalizing coercive control, police preparedness through improved education and resources is needed to effectively respond to and assess these cases.



9

## **Improving Protection Orders**

*Law Commission of Ontario*

**Improve police training on protection orders, establish stronger oversight to ensure consistent enforcement, and enhance coordination and clarity across the protection order system.**

The LCO's Improving Protection Orders project highlights that Ontario's protection order framework is excessively complex, outdated, slow, expensive, and prone to bias, resulting in inconsistent enforcement and significant barriers to safety for victims-survivors. Police responses to protection orders are often inconsistent and varied, with some officers lacking adequate training or clarity on enforcement, further undermining safety. Data from Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee reveals that 75% of intimate partner violence (IPV) cases that ended in murder were preceded by the perpetrator breaching an existing protection order, showing a systemic failure to deter and respond effectively to these violations. These changes aim to simplify the legal landscape, reduce bias, and make protection orders more accessible and effective to better protect victims-survivors.

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## **Advocates want changes to police investigating police gender-based violence accusations**

*CBC News*

**Expand the mandate of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) to include all allegations against officers, strengthen transparency in police oversight processes, and hire more women to help transform the entrenched culture within policing.**

Advocates and experts highlight the pervasive "blue wall of silence" within Ontario police forces, where officers protect their own and internal investigations tend to favor accused colleagues, raising serious concerns about accountability and public trust. This culture makes it more difficult to address gender-based violence allegations against police officers, as these cases are often handled internally by police chiefs instead of being investigated by independent oversight bodies. Survivors and former officers argue that without transparency and independent oversight, the public cannot have confidence in the justice system's ability to hold police accountable.





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## **Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT) Orientation Resource**

*Ending Violence Association of BC*

**Require a domestic violence risk assessment to be completed by trained Intimate Partner Violence Investigators (IPVIs) in every instance, to ensure consistent and effective assessment and management of risk factors in domestic violence cases.**

Outlines the structure and purpose of collaboration to address DV cases. This approach is grounded in collaborative partnerships among local agencies such as police, victim support, child welfare, health, and social services, focused on responding to high-risk cases of domestic violence. It emphasizes the importance of shared risk-related information and collaborative decision-making to develop comprehensive safety plans for victims and accountability measures for offenders. It highlights the critical role of maintaining confidentiality while complying with provincial and federal privacy laws and details how these meetings function for case review and risk designation, ensuring all members contribute relevant information.

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## **WomanACT Written Submission to the Toronto Police Board**

*WomanACT*

**Strengthen efforts to address intimate partner violence and gender-based violence through improved data coordination, enhanced cross-sector collaboration, and the adoption of survivor-centered practices.**

Efforts to address IPV and GBV require coordinated, survivor-centered, and multi-sectoral approaches. For example, expanding the use of tools like the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) can support the development of coordinated safety plans in high-risk cases. Collaborative strategies that include the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector, police, and survivors in two-way knowledge sharing help build more responsive, victim-centered, and effective early intervention practices. Strengthening community partnerships through coordinated service systems, and incorporating an IPV lens into existing community wellness tables, can improve identification, referrals, and prevention efforts. These actions, when paired with comprehensive training for all law enforcement personnel on IPV, anti-racism, and anti-oppression, contribute to a more holistic and inclusive response.

### 3. Which groups in our community might feel especially unsafe or unsupported when dealing with police (e.g., racialized women, migrants, LGBTQ+)? Why?

Indigenous, Black, Racialized, migrant and refugee women and 2SLGBTQI+ people often feel especially unsafe or unsupported when engaging with the police due to systemic discrimination, harmful stereotypes, and institutional practices that fail to meet their needs.

Black women in the Greater Toronto Area, frequently report negative encounters with police during or after IPV incidents. These interactions are often shaped by officers' reliance on racialized and gendered stereotypes, such as assumptions that Black people are criminal or that Black women are loud or aggressive. As a result, Black women often feel unheard or treated with hostility, and some have reported experiencing excessive use of force, including physical injuries. These patterns erode trust in the justice system and contribute to long-standing fears around police engagement.

Immigrant and refugee women face distinct vulnerabilities tied to their immigration status and cultural context. Many fear reporting violence because they worry it could lead to deportation or other legal consequences, particularly if their status is precarious. Systemic barriers such as language inaccessibility, lack of familiarity with Canadian laws and rights, and culturally inappropriate services leave many without meaningful avenues for support. Discriminatory and dismissive attitudes within the police and legal systems often further isolate immigrant women in violent situations.

2SLGBTQI+ people not only experience higher rates of IPV but also faces a heightened risk of police violence and discrimination when seeking help. Survivors frequently cite fears of being misgendered, not believed, or treated with hostility or suspicion, which results in lower reporting rates and limited access to justice. Misarrests are also more commonly reported in queer and trans communities.

Indigenous women and girls experience some of the highest rates of violence in the country, stemming from colonial violence, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, and socioeconomic marginalization. Many Indigenous survivors report feeling completely alienated from mainstream support systems, including police services. They fear not being taken seriously, being blamed, or encountering culturally insensitive or outright discriminatory treatment. This distrust is further compounded by a history of over-policing and under-protection—where police are more likely to criminalize Indigenous people than to intervene meaningfully when they are at risk.



## Recommendations in the Literature

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### **Contextualizing the Experiences of Black Women Arrested for Intimate Partner Violence in Canada**

*Patrina Duhaney*

**Enhance police training to address anti-Black racism, reduce implicit and explicit bias, and strengthen the ability to accurately identify the primary aggressor in IPV cases and urge social service agencies and frontline workers to adopt anti-racist, intersectional approaches that challenge stereotypes and advocate for Black women from micro to macro levels.**

The study reveals significant gaps between Toronto Police Service policies designed to address intimate partner violence (IPV) and the actual experiences of Black women survivors, who often face racialized and gendered police violence rather than protection. Many Black women expressed fear, mistrust, and reluctance to call the police due to experiences of being discredited, mistreated, or arrested, highlighting that TPS policies do not adequately safeguard or support these survivors. The findings emphasize that Black women's intersecting identities lead to systemic barriers and discrimination within the justice system, resulting in negative outcomes following police intervention.

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### **Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women**

*Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women & Children*

**Improve responses to immigrant and refugee women experiencing IPV by ensuring policies and practices incorporate race and gender analyses and address the needs of migrant workers, international students, women without legal status, LGBTQAI individuals, and women with disabilities.**

Immigrant and refugee women experiencing IPV face significant challenges when dealing with police, including fear of deportation due to precarious immigration status, discrimination and racism within service delivery systems, and limited knowledge about their legal rights and protections. They often encounter language barriers and lack culturally appropriate services, which hinders their ability to report abuse and access support. As well as concerns about losing children and facing social stigma when getting involved with law enforcement. Service providers should avoid requiring proof of legal status to access services, provide language-specific supports, employ culturally representative frontline workers, use trauma- and violence-informed approaches, and create safe spaces that support ...





... women's leadership while challenging structural and intersecting forms of inequality including racism and sexism. Building trust through equitable, collaborative relationships with immigrant and refugee communities is essential to effective prevention and support.

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## **Presentation to Legal Aid Ontario: Points of Consideration for Improving the Development of a Domestic Violence Strategy**

*Eagle Canada human Rights Trust*

**Strengthen capacity through LGBTQ2S+ and anti-racist, anti-oppressive (ARAO)-specific training for service providers, enhance visibility and access to legal services particularly in rural areas, develop explicit policies to address homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, and amend federal legislation to include gender identity in hate crime provisions.**

The presentation highlights the disproportionately high rates of domestic and intimate partner violence (D/IPV) experienced by LGBTQ2S+ communities, with particular emphasis on transgender individuals and Two Spirit women of color due to intersecting systemic oppressions such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, and colonialism. It establishes that barriers to help-seeking include discrimination, lack of inclusive services, and fear of further trauma when accessing support. These recommendations aim to create inclusive, sensitive, and effective support systems that address the complex and intersecting needs of LGBTQ2S survivors of D/IPV.

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## **Tracing individual experiences to systemic challenges: the (re)production of GBCV in migrant women's experiences in Canada**

*Busra Yalcinoz-Ucan, Evangelia Tatsoglou, Myrna Dawson*

**Improve police responses to migrant women experiencing non-physical forms of GBV through training that recognizes diverse and psychological forms of violence and addresses biases against migrant survivors.**

The study highlights that migrant women frequently experience dismissive, stigmatizing, and intimidating interactions with the police, particularly regarding non-physical forms of GBV, which undermines their safety and access to protection. More broadly, the study calls for systemic reforms that ensure context-specific, coordinated, and supportive services beyond generic solutions like shelter stays, addressing intersecting vulnerabilities and structural barriers faced by migrant women. Enhancing collaboration among social services and providing clear, accessible information can further support migrant women's navigation of safety resources.

## 4. How can we make our handling of domestic violence cases transparent?

## 5. What kind of data collection is important to the sector?

Transparency in the handling of domestic violence cases is facilitated by data collection and public reporting. Currently, police-reported statistics significantly underrepresent the true scope of intimate partner violence (IPV). One reason for this is the widespread underreporting by victims, which is often the result of fear, stigma, and a lack of confidence in the legal system and its representatives. As such, relying solely on reported cases fails to capture the severity and prevalence of IPV in our communities.

There is a lack of race-based and intersectional data which makes it challenging to understand in depth how different groups, particularly Black women, Indigenous women, newcomers, and 2SLGBTQI+ people experience policing.

Research on the perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV) is also essential for promoting transparency and accountability. While it is well-established that women experience GBV disproportionately, engaging men and boys in prevention efforts—and understanding the factors that influence their behavior—is helpful to achieving long-term solutions. This includes collecting comprehensive data on men's attitudes toward violence, their trauma histories, and the unique experiences of equity-deserving male populations. Analyzing this data not only helps identify systemic biases and disproportionate impacts but also supports the development of targeted, equitable interventions that better meet the needs of diverse survivors

Comprehensive documentation of every IPV-related police interaction, regardless of whether charges are laid, also promotes transparency through data collection. This includes the type of violence reported and the relationship between the parties, the presence of injuries, use of risk assessment tools, and whether referrals were made to community supports. It is especially important to document indicators of coercive control, which may not leave physical evidence but are a common and highly dangerous form of abuse. Information on officer training and victim feedback on police conduct should also be recorded, analyzed, and reported to assess systemic gaps and areas for improvement.



## Recommendations in the Literature

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### **Responsible information-sharing in situations intimate partner violence**

*Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada*

**The report recommends the development of privacy-compliant policies and procedures, mandatory staff training, transparency with affected individuals about potential disclosures, and collaboration with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial (FPT) Commissioners to create guidance and education campaigns.**

For the Violence Against Women sector, when collaborating to provide services, projects, etc. for survivors, one of the main challenges is information-sharing; thus, the article highlights the importance of responsible information sharing to prevent and reduce intimate partner violence (IPV), especially in situations where privacy concerns may create hesitation or confusion among professionals.

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### **City of Toronto to Declare IPV and GVB Epidemic**

*Aura Freedom International*

**The report recommends declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic, improving transparency and data collection, recognizing IPV as a public health and societal issue, and committing to coordinated, meaningful actions and support services for survivors.**

It emphasizes that the true scale of intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) in Toronto is under-researched and significantly under-reported, with police data not fully reflecting the severity of the problem. Improved transparency and more comprehensive data collection would help to better understand and address these issues. By declaring IPV an epidemic, the City of Toronto would send a strong message to survivors and commit to meaningful action, including better support services and policies informed by more accurate data.





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## **Sharing Information in Situations Involving Intimate Partner Violence: Guidance for Professionals**

*Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario*

**Recommends establishing transparent and accountable information-sharing frameworks, clearly communicating data practices, implementing safeguards against unauthorized use, ensuring disclosures are necessary and proportionate, and seeking guidance in complex cases.**

This guidance addresses the sharing of personal information in situations involving intimate partner violence (IPV), focusing particularly on instances where there is a risk of serious harm to health or safety. It outlines the legal frameworks in Ontario that permit sharing personal information without consent under specific circumstances, including sectors such as justice, health care, and child, youth, and family services. It emphasizes the importance of assessing objective risk and necessity when deciding to share information and highlights various legal provisions that support these actions to protect individuals at risk.

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## **Recommendation to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy Study in Intimate Partner Violence Public Hearing**

*shift (The Project to End Domestic Violence)*

**Recommends investing in robust, disaggregated gender-sensitive data systems, fund research on perpetration and public perceptions (especially among disengaged men), and establish a sustainable, evidence-informed funding model to support a provincial strategy focused on preventing male violence and engaging men and boys in IPV prevention.**

The submission emphasizes a critical gap in data collection on the perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Canada, noting that without robust, consistent, and gendered data, prevention efforts remain ineffective. It calls for funding research on public perceptions, particularly targeting disengaged male populations vulnerable to extremist influences. A sustainable, evidence-informed funding model to support a provincial strategy focused on disrupting male violence trajectories and involving men and boys in prevention efforts is also recommended. These measures aim to enhance transparency, understanding, and accountability in IPV prevention.

## 6. Is there usefulness in an ongoing dialogue and how might that best be done? What would it look like?

Ongoing, meaningful dialogue between police and community organizations is essential for a coordinated, survivor-centered response to intimate partner violence. It fosters trust, mutual learning, and ensures that survivor experiences inform policy, while also helping to identify gaps, avoid duplication, and strengthen accountability.

There are several promising models already in use across Ontario that show how structured, collaborative dialogue can improve IPV responses. These structures should include regular meetings or standing advisory tables with representation from shelters, legal services, public health, child protection, and survivor-led organizations. Multi-sectoral risk intervention models, such as Situation Tables, bring together representatives from justice, health, education, social services, and child welfare to identify and intervene in cases where individuals or families face an elevated risk of harm. These models support proactive intervention and collective safety planning. Community-based case conferencing committees use standardized tools to assess risk, and include diverse partners such as IPV advocates, police, and child protection workers, helping to ensure that decision-making is well-informed and consistent.

Inter-agency protocols that outline roles, information-sharing agreements, and responsibilities can improve trust, ensure smoother coordination, and help ensure that critical safety information is exchanged legally and efficiently.

Cross-sector training is also an important part of ongoing dialogue. When professionals across policing, healthcare, child protection, and community services are trained together on gender-based violence, risk assessment, and privacy law, it fosters a shared understanding and language. This reduces conflict, confusion, and inconsistency in how survivors are supported and how risks are assessed. It is also helpful to collaborate with the VAW organizations to have discussions with survivors as part of an ongoing dialogue to inform processes and services.

It is important that Indigenous communities are included as equal partners in any ongoing dialogue. Ontario's action plans on gender-based violence and the recommendations from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls both emphasize the importance of Indigenous-led approaches and culturally safe partnerships. Ongoing engagement with Indigenous organizations and First Nations police services is crucial for developing responses that respect Indigenous sovereignty and meet the specific needs of Indigenous survivors.



## Recommendations in the Literature

21

### **Guidance on information sharing**

*Law and Safety, Government of Ontario*

**This guide recommends fostering transparent, consent-based multi-sectoral collaboration by involving only necessary agencies in interventions, publicly disclosing information sharing practices, and providing timely written notice to individuals when their personal information is shared, all while respecting privacy and minimizing data use.**

This guidance outlines the framework for information sharing among various agencies participating in multi-sectoral risk intervention models, such as Situation Tables, to address individuals at acutely elevated risk of harm. It emphasizes the importance of complying with privacy legislation, including PHIPA and CYFSA, balancing the need to share personal information to reduce risk with legal requirements for consent, transparency, and data minimization. The document also underscores the role of professional ethics and the necessity for multi-agency collaboration to effectively mitigate serious harm while respecting individuals' privacy rights.

22

### **Programming Response for Intimate Partner Violence**

*Department of Justice, Government of Canada*

**Calls for continuous evaluation and improvement of IPV programs, fostering partnerships across sectors, addressing the diverse needs of communities, and maintaining a balanced approach that focuses on both offender accountability and victim support.**

The report highlights the importance of fostering dialogue and collaboration among multiple sectors to create a coordinated and holistic response to intimate partner violence (IPV) in Ontario. This approach involves shared responsibilities across justice, community, and social service sectors, emphasizing partnerships to better support victims and hold offenders accountable. The Domestic Violence Court programs serve as a central point integrating specialized Crown Attorneys, probation, victim assistance, and PAR programs, ensuring consistency and timely resolutions.





23

### **Ontario's Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: Call for Proposals Guidelines**

*Government of Ontario*

**Recommends strengthening multi-agency and cross-sector collaboration, providing culturally responsive and trauma-informed services, improving service providers' capacity to recognize and respond to needs, and promoting economic security and independence to reduce gender-based violence.**

This call for proposals emphasizes fostering cross-sector collaboration and partnerships to strengthen prevention-focused programs and provide coordinated services for survivors. Recommendations stem from multiple reviews and inquests, including the CKW Inquest and Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

24

### **Ontario-STANDS: Standing Together Against gender-based violence Now through Decisive actions, prevention, empowerment and Supports**

*Government of Ontario*

**Recommends enhancing cross-sector collaboration and information sharing, implementing culturally responsive and trauma-informed programs, supporting early intervention and prevention efforts, improving access to housing, legal, and mental health services for survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable to reduce recurrence of gender-based violence.**

The Ontario-STANDS action plan shows the importance of fostering dialogue and collaboration across multiple sectors, such as education, social services, housing, health, and justice to create a coordinated response to gender-based violence. The plan was developed in partnership with various ministries, Indigenous partners, municipalities, and community stakeholders to ensure it meets diverse local contexts. The plan also follows recommendations from inquiries and committees, like the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, emphasizing culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches.

## 7. Systemic Challenges: cross-charging and court-impacts and challenges in the Court System Impacting Services and Processes & Broader Support for Addressing the IPV Epidemic

Cross-charging in intimate partner violence (IPV) cases is a persistent and harmful issue, often a result of the application of mandatory charging policies. These policies, while originally implemented to ensure that IPV was taken seriously by police, have led to the unintended consequence of criminalizing survivors, primarily women. This outcome is especially damaging for Black women, Indigenous women, migrant women, and women living in poverty, who are already disproportionately impacted by systemic inequities in the justice system.

In many instances, abusive male partners strategically call the police first to take control of the narrative, shift blame, and avoid accountability. As a result, survivors may be arrested or charged simply for defending themselves or reacting to prolonged trauma. This dynamic is exacerbated by a policing approach that often prioritizes visible injuries or immediate evidence over the broader context of the relationship. The result is that coercive control, emotional abuse, and long-term patterns of violence are routinely overlooked.

Understanding and managing cross-charging more effectively requires police services to recognize the complexity of IPV, including its non-physical forms. For example, by implementing mandatory training that is developed in collaboration with the community and grounded in research. It also requires a shift away from binary assessments of violence and a move toward practices that reflect the power imbalances and psychological tactics that characterize abusive relationships. As well as the consideration of a consistent, province-wide risk assessment framework that reflects the full range of IPV indicators including lethality risk factors. This supports grounding decisions in a comprehensive understanding of the abuse, rather than surface-level indicators.



## Recommendations in the Literature

25

### **Mandatory Charging Policies and the Criminalization of Intimate-Partner Violence Victims in Canada**

*WomanACT*

**Recommends adopting trauma- and violence-informed care (TVIC) principles, which emphasize equity-oriented, individualized responses that aim to prevent violence proactively and prioritize healing over punishment. Implementing comprehensive training, institutional commitment, and the dismantling of structural biases within policing and justice systems to transform how IPV is addressed.**

The report highlights that mandatory charging policies in Canada intended to criminalize IPV perpetrators have led to unintended consequences such as cross-charging, where victims (often women defending themselves) are also criminally charged due to difficulties in identifying the primary aggressor. This practice reflects systemic challenges, including police officers' lack of trauma-informed training and biases within the criminal justice system, which can re-traumatize survivors and diminish trust in law enforcement. The court system's approach, coupled with these policing issues, perpetuates the criminalization of IPV survivors, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.

26

### **Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission: Recommendations**

*Mass Casualty Commission*

**Calls for replacing mandatory arrest and charging policies for intimate partner violence with structured, women-centered decision-making frameworks involving community and expert collaboration; increasing funding and societal commitment to ending gender-based violence; enhancing police accountability and addressing systemic biases; recognizing and supporting marginalized women; involving men and boys in prevention efforts; and ensuring legal and public education reforms that address coercive control and support survivor-centered responses.**

The Mass Casualty Commission highlights systemic challenges related to cross-charging, particularly in the context of intimate partner violence, where police and prosecutors must carefully consider complexities such as coercive control before laying charges against survivors. These recommendations address how court processes and systemic biases intersect with policing and emphasize collaboration, education, and policy changes to overcome these challenges.



## 8. Are there challenges in the courts that impact TPS services and processes?

## 9. How can the Service and the Board best support addressing the IPV epidemic more broadly?

Yes, there are significant challenges in the court system that directly affect how the TPS responds to IPV/GBV. Survivors often find the court process overwhelming, slow, and ineffective, which undermines their trust in both the legal system and police. Ontario's protection order system is widely seen as outdated and inconsistently enforced, with many breaches going unpunished. Between 2003 and 2021, a quarter of IPV-related homicides in the province involved perpetrators who had already violated a protection order—highlighting serious issues in enforcement that put survivors at risk and frustrate police efforts to keep them safe.

There is also a lack of coordination between criminal and family courts, which can lead to conflicting orders—for example, when family court grants contact with a child despite safety concerns raised in criminal court. These inconsistencies create confusion for survivors and leave TPS officers trying to navigate a fragmented legal landscape with unclear enforcement responsibilities.

Additionally, conditions are often not survivor-centred or clearly enforceable due to inconsistent training for both police and the courts. Courts frequently fall short in adequate safety planning alongside protection orders leaving survivors without the knowledge or tools—such as how to document breaches or access security resources—to protect themselves or support police investigations. Recognizing IPV as a preventable public health issue is essential to shifting this paradigm. Declaring IPV an epidemic (already done by more than 95 Ontario communities) would reframe it from an issue of isolated criminal acts to one of systemic, widespread harm with sociological and public health implications. These legal and systemic gaps seem to reduce the ability of TPS to respond effectively, leading to a cycle where survivors feel unsafe and disengaged, and police are left operating in a system that lacks clarity, consistency, and accountability. To address these issues, there is a need for legal reform, clearer procedures, better enforcement, and cross-sector strategies that treat IPV as a public health and social equity issue.



## Recommendations in the Literature

27

### **Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2023**

*Statistics Canada*

**Understand the intersectional and specific factors driving the different trends for different populations, and the importance of raising awareness of the current scope of family and intimate partner violence.**

The report highlights that family violence and intimate partner violence overall increased in 2023 with highest recorded levels reached for children, youth and seniors. The report highlights that women and girls are the victims in majority of family violence cases (68%) and cases of intimate partner violence (78%), although there is an increase in reports from men and boys. For youth victimization, in 62% of family violence cases, girls were the victims. Girls were twice as likely to be victimized than boys under any recorded youth violence in 2023. In 2023, women and girls between the ages of 12-24 report intimate partner violence at 7 times the rate of men and boys, women between the ages of 25-26 report intimate partner violence at three times the rate of men, and senior women made up of 57% of family violence cases where the majority was victimized by a spouse followed by a child.

28

### **Criminalization of coercive control: Effective implementation**

*Luke's Place*

**Systemic reforms in the court system would improve responses to intimate partner violence (IPV) and specifically coercive control.**

It calls for establishing standards of practice for police responses to IPV, regular assessment of officers' handling of cases, and accountability measures. Further recommendations include mandatory new training for police, judges, and Crown prosecutors to better understand IPV and coercive control, alongside support for survivors through independent legal advice and court support programs. Additionally, it stresses the importance of a national collaborative framework for a women-centered approach to IPV, ongoing education, and public awareness campaigns to enhance the effectiveness and sensitivity of the criminal justice system in dealing with coercive control and IPV cases.



## **Declaring Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic**

*Association of Municipalities of Ontario*

**The report recommends declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic, integrating femicide prevention into Community Safety and Wellbeing plans, promoting education and awareness, supporting collaboration among community agencies, and ensuring sustained funding for prevention and early intervention efforts.**

The report highlights intimate partner violence (IPV) as a widespread and critical public health issue causing severe human, social, and economic costs, emphasizing that women and marginalized groups face disproportionate risks including femicide. It shows that IPV is often rooted in broader social inequities, which exacerbates vulnerability. The current system's crisis-driven response is inadequate, as violence tends to escalate predictably without early intervention. The trauma from IPV extends beyond individuals directly affected, impacting families and communities.