

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

WOMEN IN CANADA

The definition of violence against women that has informed the Committee's thinking throughout this report is borrowed from the Brief entitled *Male Violence Against Women: The Brutal Face of Inequality*, which was submitted to the Committee by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Violence against women is a multifaceted problem which encompasses physical, psychological, and economic violations of women which is integrally linked to the social/economic/political structures, values, and policies that silence women in our society, support gender-based discrimination, and maintain women's inequality.

This definition relates the abuse of women to their unequal status in our society and to societal beliefs, attitudes and values that condone violence against women. It is the view of the Committee that conceptualizing violence against women in this way leads to the inevitable conclusion that effective solutions to the problem must involve altering the status of women and traditional values that structure gender relations.

The national statistical reporting system in Canada, the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system, contains statistics on criminal incidents in Canada. This database includes only crimes reported to police and records reported incidents of wife assault or assault. The UCR does not contain descriptive information about the relationship between victims and offenders or about the circumstances of the offence which would identify incidents of violence against women in the family.

In order to measure the frequency of those crimes that do not come to the attention of enforcement officials and those which take place in the family home, other sources of data have been developed. Victimization surveys ask respondents to report anonymously on incidents in a particular time frame in which they were the victim of a physical or sexual assault. One of the advantages of such surveys is that they measure both those incidents that were and were not reported to police. Another source of data are public opinion surveys measuring public attitudes towards and awareness of violence against women. Special studies carried out with shelters for battered women, sexual assault centres and other front-line agencies provide information on the number of victims who have sought assistance from these agencies.