

The Committee heard that the susceptibility of women to being victimized by violent crimes is linked to their lack of equality with men in social, economic and political spheres of life. In other words, women's inequality is a contributing factor to the fear and types of violence women experience in the home and in public. Violence against women that occurs in the context of the family has profound negative impacts on the direct victim as well as on the children who observe it.

Indeed, the negative ramifications that violence against women in the family has on the children who witness the violence was emphasized by Kathryn Wahama, of the Port Coquitlam Women's Centre. In her view, family violence is an antecedent to crime (81:52) This was confirmed by much of the evidence heard by the House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Women in 1991 in its study of violence against women. For example, a London, Ontario study conducted in 1987 found that more than 50% of young offenders charged with violent crimes had witnessed their fathers assaulting their mothers. Another study found the rate of wife-beating was 1,000 times higher for men who had witnessed violence in their childhood than for men who had not.²⁷

Although this study has not dealt in-depth with the issue of violence against women, the Committee acknowledges that it poses significant risks to the community. The Committee is aware that this element of the crime problem is currently under study by the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. The Panel has conducted consultations across the country, over the past year and a half, with survivors of violence and has held meetings with various populations of women. They include: the disabled, refugees, women of colour, the elderly, youth, women living in rural and isolated communities, linguistic minorities and aboriginal women. The Panel will be reporting on its findings no later than the summer of 1993.

Hugh Baker, of the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia, described some of the conditions in aboriginal communities that breed exploitation and crime. He cautioned the Committee that any attempt to reduce crime and violence in aboriginal communities will not succeed unless the social and economic deprivation suffered by native people is addressed.

Crime is greater in the aboriginal community because pimps come to the aboriginal community knowing there are women who are desperate to earn an income. Drug dealers come to the aboriginal community knowing there are people who are desperate to escape, even if only mentally. People come to the aboriginal community knowing there are going to be people who are intoxicated who they can take advantage of, either by beating them or robbing them. People come to the aboriginal community trying to start youth gangs because they know the youth have no future. . .and the gang can offer them something better than what they have. (82:16-17)

Calvin Lee stressed the importance of courses in English as a second language, as well as acculturation and social services, to keep new immigrants of student age from becoming frustrated and involved in criminal gangs. (80:35) Appropriate housing and other social measures to prevent the creation of disadvantaged ethnic ghettos, according to Marc LeBlanc, would also have a considerable impact on crime among immigrant youths. (75:10)

These accounts of the conditions that contribute to crime and criminality make clear that there is no single root cause of crime. Rather, it is the outcome of the interaction of a constellation of factors that include: poverty, physical and sexual abuse, illiteracy, low self-esteem, inadequate housing,

²⁷ Report of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women, (June 1991), p. 13.