

C. Violence in the Home and on the Streets

114. It seems very likely that directly experienced neglect and abuse at the hands of a parent or guardian are not the only forms of violence which may have long-term consequences and lead to criminal behaviour. The child that witnesses regular incidents of physical violence will, according to clinical experience, often later demonstrate similar outbursts of uncontrollable rage and violence of its own. Aggression can become an easy outlet for frustration and tensions. It is not only imitating a bad behaviour model, but also something happens to its sense of reality, to the development of its controls against violent impulses and to its character.⁵¹ Violence becomes legitimized for the child and this, coupled with its failure to develop controls, may mean that its impulses take a criminal direction later.

115. Canadians like to imagine the family as a refuge from the stresses and strains of the outside world. While this is true, there is another reality. "The family is both the most loving and supportive of human groups and also by far the most physically violent group or institution." Violence in the home is a far more serious problem than violence in the streets, in the classrooms, or anywhere else. Many of our witnesses made this point. Thus, "domestic violence is increasingly being recognized as the most dangerous element in our society, with the potential for terrific disaster."⁵² The family can be the training ground for violence.⁵³ Various studies show that a very high percentage of all murder victims are related to their assailants, most frequently as husband and wife. Between 1968 and 1974, 37.3% of all murder cases were reported as domestic; 60% of all female murder victims were killed within a family context. Every year there are tens of thousands of violent confrontations in Canadian families that do not lead to murder, that may not even be reported — wife beatings (more rarely, husband beatings), child beatings, brawls between children, or even extreme verbal and psychological abuse. It has recently been estimated that every year in Canada one in ten women who are married or are living common-law is the victim of a physical assault.⁵⁴ The child that is forced to witness these confrontations on a regular basis, even if it is not the object of their violence, cannot but suffer psychological insult.