



Adult Workshop

Part Two: Backgrounder



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I. Gender Equality

Definition

Principles of gender equality are centered on the belief that women and men are equal. Gender equality involves: promoting the full participation of women as equal partners in sustainable social development; encouraging the equal participation of women and men in all decision-making capacities; supporting women and girls so that they are fully able to exercise their rights to life, liberty, security of person, education, healthcare etc; and reducing the gap between women's and men's access to and control of resources. Gender equality can only be achieved when women are recognized as agents of change in all economic, social and political processes.

Gender Equity

Gender equity not only demands a substantive change in the policies and attitudes that govern gender roles and identities but also requires that an increased commitment be made to ensure that equal opportunity is accompanied by equal access.

Status of Gender Equality in Canada

The dramatic improvement of principles of gender equality and gender equity in Canada over the past few decades, has contributed to an increase in both the formal and substantive equality enjoyed by Canadian women. Canada is not only a signatory to numerous international agreements and conventions, which cite gender equality as a necessary requisite for progress, but also declares fundamental equality for all within its own *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Nevertheless, thousands of Canadian women still cannot exercise their fundamental economic, political and social rights. In fact, the gender gap in Canada is much wider than commonly believed.

This inequality is perhaps most obvious in the economic spheres of Canadian society. Dr. Karen Hadley, author of "And We Still Ain't Satisfied" *Gender Inequality in Canada: A Status Report for 2001*, approximates that Canadian women are earning 61 percent of what Canadian men are earning. Dr. Hadley reports that Canadian women are still denied access to many of the Canada's high paying professional jobs. Furthermore, Canadian women are far more susceptible to poverty than men. In Canada, approximately 20 percent of Canadian women are living in poverty. Those numbers are higher for women of colour (37 percent of whom are living in poverty) and Aboriginal women (43 percent of whom are living in poverty).

Reference: Hadley, Karen Dr. "And We Still Ain't Satisfied," *Gender Inequality in Canada: A Status Report for 2001*. Released by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the CSJ Foundation. 2001.

Gender Inequality and Violence against Women

The issues of gender inequality and violence against women are fundamentally interconnected. Gender inequality remains one of the root causes of violence against women while violence against women serves as both an acute manifestation of gender inequality and a means of perpetuating it.¹ Gender discrimination and inequality, which is rooted in the socially constructed gender roles and identities assigned to women and men, denies women access to

¹ World Health Organization. 'Addressing Violence against Women and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals.' *Department of Gender, Women and Health Family and Community Health*. (2005)
<http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSSept05.pdf>

critical resources², including education, employment, capital and information and knowledge. Without access to these social resources, women's power to make decisions, earn a living and free themselves from situations of violence and domination is seriously compromised. Ending violence against women is central to the promotion of gender equality; at the same time, achieving gender equality is crucial to the elimination of violence against women.

II. Violence against Women

Definition

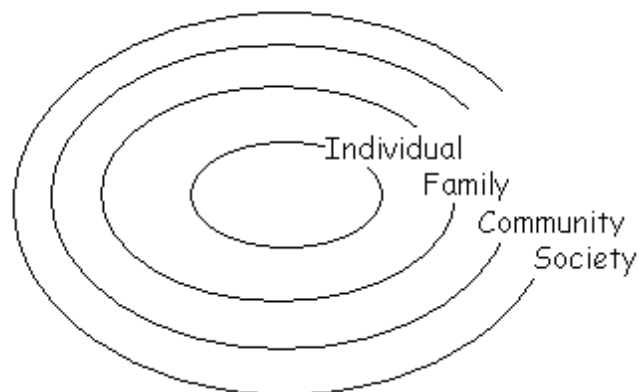
Violence against women is any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts and coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life.

Violence against women includes: physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, harassment or intimidation; sexual abuse or rape, including marital rape; battery; domestic violence; forced prostitution; trafficking in women and girls; burning or acid throwing; female genital mutilation; female feticide and infanticide; violence in armed conflict; systemic rape; sexual slavery; forced pregnancy; and forced marriage.

Where Does Violence against Women Happen?

Violence against women persists globally as both a pervasive violation of human rights and a significant impediment to achieving gender equality. It is estimated that one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by a male in her lifetime. Despite successful actions by women's organizations over the past three decades, the scale and severity of violence against women is increasing.

Who Does Violence against Women Affect?



² UNICEF. 'Gender Equality.' <http://www.unicef.org/gender/index.html>



Violence against women endangers the health and violates the rights of millions of women and girls around the world, regardless of race, socio-economic status, religion or ethnicity.

Some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to violence, including:

- women belonging to minority or indigenous groups
- refugees
- migrant labourers
- women living in poverty
- women living in rural or remote communities
- women placed in federal institutions or in detention centres
- displaced persons
- women who have been repatriated
- women living in situations of armed conflict and wars of aggression
- women living in areas, in which civil conflict and terrorism are present
- female children
- elderly women

What are the Effects of Violence against Women?

- Violence against women is not only a violation of fundamental human rights but it is also an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. Globally, violence against women has eroded women's rights to life, health, security, autonomy, bodily integrity and political participation.
- Violence against women carries serious consequences for both women's physical and psychological health; these consequences extend beyond any immediate physical damage. Women who have experienced violence are susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms and suicide. Women who have experienced sexual violence have often experienced early sexual initiation and are increasingly vulnerable to unprotected sex, unplanned pregnancies and the contraction of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Women who have experienced violence may also suffer from social isolation and rejection, lowered self-esteem and economic dependence.
- Children who experience violence or witness marital violence within the home have a higher propensity to become violent with others or suffer from violence themselves. Children experiencing domestic or family violence might also suffer from: emotional trauma, difficulties in school, lack of concentration, social isolation, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence and unstable living conditions.
- Violence against women has enormous social, economic and political repercussions for society at large. Violence against women undermines a society's social framework for development, justice, peace and equality. The economic costs associated with violence against women are high, included in these costs are: health care, policing, incarceration, intervention, transition houses, diminished productive capacities, social services, child services, court proceedings and intergenerational effects.

Why Does Violence against Women Occur?

Violence against women can be attributed to a wide variety of socio-cultural factors, including:

- **Historically unequal power relations between women and men**
- **Differentiated socialization of girls and boys**
- **Women's unequal access to political, economic and legal sectors**
- **The use of violent means to resolve interpersonal conflict**
- **Unequal symbolizations and valuations of women's and men's bodies**

Although acts of violence against women are often perpetrated by individuals, it is important to consider that gender-based violence is a learned behaviour. Socialization plays a major role in such learning. Individual acts are supported overtly or tacitly through social institutions such as the family, the community or the state, either through normative rules or by impunity towards acts of violence.

Listed below are some of the factors that can contribute to an increased prevalence in violence against women at different levels of society:

Individual Level: Research indicates that individuals who experience violence or abuse as a child or witness marital violence in the home are more likely to perpetrate or suffer from partner violence. Frequent use of drugs or alcohol also lead to an increased prevalence of violence against women.

Community Level: Women's isolation and lack of social support, together with male peer groups which condone and legitimize men's violence, predict higher rates of violence against women.

State Level: Studies have found that inadequate legislations and policies to prevent and punish acts of violence, as well as, low levels of sensitivity and awareness among law enforcement agencies and social services, are linked to a higher incidence of violence.

Family and Relationship Level:

Cross-cultural studies have cited male control of wealth, male decision-making within the home and martial violence strong predictors and indicators of violence against women.

Societal Level: Studies conducted around the world have found that violence against women is most common where gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced and where the concept of masculinity is linked to toughness, male honour and dominance. Other social norms associated with abuse include the tolerance of physical punishment of women and children and the perception that men have 'ownership' and control over women.

It is clear that actions to end violence must address a range of issues, from women's unequal access to resources and decision-making in the family to concepts of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, the male 'right' to dominance and control in all social institutions, including community-level groups, education systems and state structures, where these notions are fostered and perpetuated, must be challenged. So far, the responsibility for tackling violence against women has mostly rested on women's organizations; however, violence against women affects entire communities and thus, has to be addressed by both men and women.



III. 'We Can'

What is the 'We Can' Campaign?

The 'We Can End All Violence against Women' campaign is a multi-year, international initiative, which seeks to challenge and change the societal attitudes, beliefs and practices that support and maintain violence against women.

In 2004, the campaign was launched in five South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Pakistan and in March 2007, 'We Can' was expanded to include Afghanistan.

The British Columbia 'We Can' campaign was officially launched in June 2007. It is run by a coalition of diverse organizations that include women's groups, unions, international development agencies, legal education organizations, multicultural service providers, youth groups, businesses, media and others.

As African, East Asian, European and Latin American countries are joining the campaign it is becoming a truly global movement.

Campaign Objectives

'We Can' seeks to promote and encourage:

- ❖ an environment in which violence against women is never acceptable
- ❖ a collective and visible stand against violence against women
- ❖ a popular movement to end all violence against women
- ❖ and a cooperative network between local, provincial and regional alliances working to end violence against women

Campaign Strategy

The British Columbia 'We Can' campaign believes that violence against women is rooted in structural inequalities and widespread misconceptions of gender roles and identities. 'We Can' aims to fight violence against women by changing individuals' attitudes towards women. 'We Can' works with men and women to re-evaluate and re-define concepts of gender and identity and endeavors to breakdown structural gender inequalities.

'We Can' believes that every individual has the power to change her or his own life as well as the lives of those around them; however, 'We Can' recognizes that people need to feel the need for change and understand the benefits of change before real change can occur.

A key element of the 'We Can' campaign model is educating and mobilizing individuals to take a public stand and public action against violence against women. This is achieved by inviting ordinary women, men and children to become 'Change Makers'.

Who is a Change Maker?

A Change Maker is an individual who pledges not to commit or tolerate any violence against women, who works to re-evaluate his/her own attitudes and who agrees to encourage at least five other people to do the same.

In communicating and discussing violence against women with others, each Change Maker secures support for her or his own change. As circles of influence begin to overlap and the number of Change Makers within a given group or geographical location attains a critical mass, an environment is created in which women experiencing violence or individuals wishing to speak out against violence will receive both support and encouragement.

Change Makers Believe:

- ❖ Violence against women is never acceptable
- ❖ Change in current gender perceptions and attitudes is essential and possible
- ❖ Violence against women is a public issue, not a private matter
- ❖ Each individual has the potential to change her or his own life
- ❖ Change must begin now

What Do Change Makers Do?

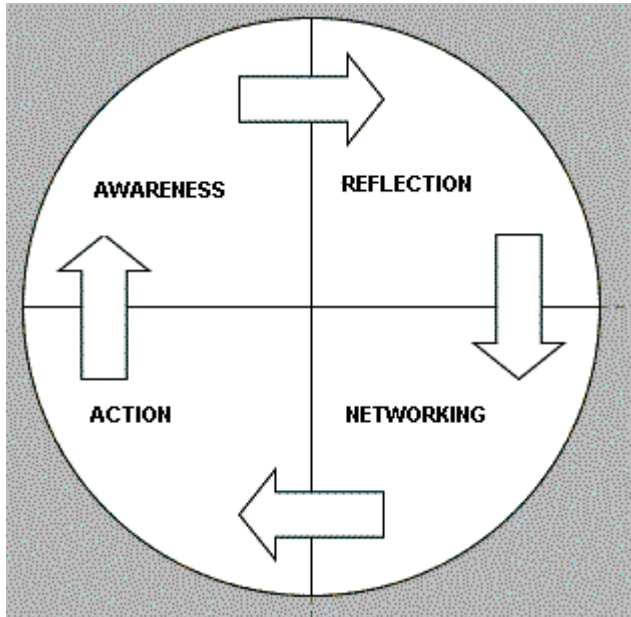
- ❖ Initiate and encourage discussion about gender inequality and violence against women
- ❖ Act as role models of alternative behaviours
- ❖ Encourage others to recognize the various forms of gender violence and discrimination
- ❖ Enlist the help of influential community members to create a positive environment and to reduce risks for women

How Can They Do This?

- ❖ Talk to friends, neighbours and colleagues to raise awareness about violence against women and encourage them to re-examine their own attitudes and practices
- ❖ Increase their own awareness about violence against women
- ❖ Disseminate campaign information
- ❖ Challenge existing gender biased attitudes, stereotypes and practices
- ❖ Take a public stand against violence against women
- ❖ Support women who are experiencing violence

Model of Change

The model of change this campaign seeks to support is one of **awareness, reflection, action and change.**



This is not a linear process; the progression of awareness and the understanding and readiness for action take time, repeated exposure to ideas, demonstration and peer challenging and support.

Change Makers are the key players in raising awareness, breaking the silence and inspiring and demanding change.



Key Things to Remember:

- Violence against women is institutionalized at all levels of society – individuals, family, community and state/institutional. To foster women’s equal worth and opportunity, it is necessary to address the issue of gender discrimination and violence against women at each level.
- Violence against women is not a private matter but a public issue. Until individuals recognize this and challenge practices of violence against women, violence and discrimination will continue.
- The social, cultural, political, economic and legal factors act to increase women’s vulnerability to discrimination and violence must be addressed.
- Ending violence against women requires a change in the deeply entrenched and pervasive societal attitudes and practices that endorse violence against women. Attempting to change these attitudes and practices is a difficult task, one which often invites confrontation.
- The model of change ‘We Can’ seeks to support is one of awareness, reflection, networking and action. This is not a linear process; the progression of awareness and the understanding and readiness for action will take time, repeated exposure to ideas, demonstration and peer challenging and support.
- State interventions and legal solutions designed to protect women through effective implementation of legislation, have consistently been hindered by the lack of support from dominant public and community interests. Bringing change at the individual level is a necessary prerequisite for bringing change in society. *In this sense, change must begin with the individual and extend to the family, the community and the society.*
- People need to feel the need for change, see its benefits and initiate the process by raising awareness, breaking the silence and rejecting ideas and beliefs that support violence against women.
- Individuals, local groups, regional alliances and national institutions must work together to achieve the values of equality, mutuality, collectivity and justice.
- Public mobilization and education will lead to the transformation of unequal power relations and will facilitate the empowerment of women.

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.”

Former United Nations Secretary General - Kofi Annan



Resources

- The British Columbia 'We Can' Website: www.wecanbc.ca
- The South Asia/International 'We Can' Website: www.wecanendvaw.org
- The United Nations 4th World Conference on Women:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>
- Status of Women Canada: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/>
- Women's Organizations in British Columbia:
<http://www.distel.ca/womlist/countries/canada/britishcolumbia.html>

Supporting Victims of Violence

- VictimLINK: 1 800-563-0808 (Toll free 24/7 helpline for victims of family and sexual violence)
- Youth Against Violence Line: 1 800 680-4264 (Toll free 24/7 helpline for youth)
- List of BC Transition Houses: <http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/women/contacts/th.htm>
- VictimsINFO: <http://victimsinfo.ca> (For victims and witnesses of crime in BC)

Legal Tools

- Legal Aid: <http://www.lss.bc.ca>
- Guide to BC Court System: <http://www.courtsofbc.ca>
- Family Law: <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca>
- Legal Resources Database: <http://www.clicklaw.bc.ca>