

Violence against Women and the Canadian Law

(20 min)

Objective: This activity introduces participants to the fundamentals of the Canadian justice system. It informs the participants about the criminal charges that can apply in violence against women cases. The activity builds on the previously explored types of abuse, and enables participants to make critical connections with legal response.

Setup: Overhead transparencies 'Criminal Law vs. Civil Law' and 'Common Charges in Relationship Abuse Cases'; 'Relationship Abuse Case Study' handouts.

Introduce participants to the basics of the Canadian legal system (see 'Backgrounder').

Display 'Criminal Law vs. Civil Law' transparency, and highlight the key differences.

Ask: What kinds of criminal charges can apply to cases where there is violence against women.

Display 'Common Charges in Relationship Abuse Cases' transparency. Go over the definitions.

Ask: Were the participants surprised at any of the definitions? If so, why?

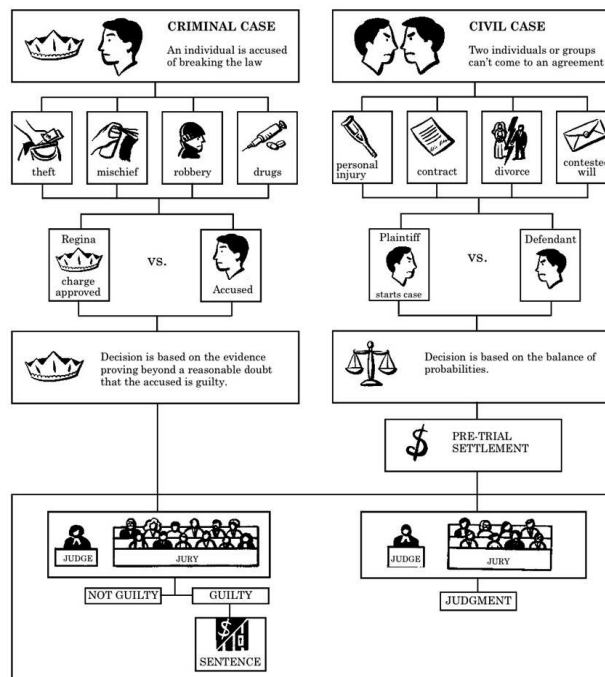
Common Charges in Relationship Abuse Cases

Uttering threats: It is a criminal offence to utter a threat to kill or seriously harm another person, to destroy another person's personal property or to injure or kill an animal or bird belonging to another person.

Assault: When someone touches another person, directly or indirectly, without that person's consent it is an assault. It is also an assault when the person attempts or threatens to touch another person. This is a criminal offence, whether or not the victim has any physical injuries.

Criminal harassment: Making threats against a person, if it causes that other person to be fearful for his/her safety.

Criminal Law vs. Civil Law





Buzz groups: Divide the participants in groups of 3-4 people, or ask them to work in pairs. Distribute the copies of the 'Relationship Abuse Case Study'. Give the groups some time to read the case study (3-4 min) and to discuss the questions on the handout (5 min).

Relationship Abuse Case Study

Together for just under five years, a married couple was going through a rough time. Things were great at first, but over the past year the husband became very controlling and harsh. They began to fight a lot, and when they did he would put her down and humiliate her. He became very cruel, calling her names and even threatening to harm their dog to get back at her.

One evening, she arrived home after an evening out with her friends to find him waiting for her. He was very angry. While he did not physically hit her that night, he was very aggressive and his body language was extremely threatening. His behavior was scaring her more and more, but she didn't feel like she needed to tell anyone because he hadn't actually hit her. She was also ashamed of their fighting and felt uncomfortable telling anybody about it.

A few months after that night, he began to be physically violent with her. Their fights ended with him pushing and hitting her. Afterwards he would apologize with such genuine emotion that she felt she had no choice but to forgive him: he was her husband after all. She was feeling very vulnerable and was even afraid to be in her own home sometimes. She wanted to talk to someone about it but had no idea where to go.

Discussion Questions:

1. At what point do you think that this woman's experience with this man would count as abuse?
2. At what point do you think a crime has occurred, and she has grounds to take legal action against him?

Debrief on the discussion that took place in groups/pairs. Write down the answers on the board.