



FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO

For People. For Change.

July 13, 2023

FST Statement Re: Ontario Government's Rejection to Declare Intimate Partner Violence as an Epidemic

Family Service Toronto, an organization dedicated to supporting survivors of violence against women (VAW), is deeply concerned and disappointed by the Ontario government's recent decision to reject the recommendation to declare intimate partner violence (IPV) as an epidemic across the province. This decision, published on June 28th 2023, does a disservice to the countless victims and their families who have suffered the devastating consequences of IPV.

On the morning of September 22, 2015, in rural Renfrew County, three women, Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam were murdered by a man with whom each had a past relationship. The perpetrator was arrested later that day and has been imprisoned ever since. A Coroner's Inquest was held into these femicides in June 2022 in Pembroke, Ontario. The five-person jury made 86 recommendations for change. On the first anniversary of the issuing of these recommendations, the government of Ontario responded to 38 of the recommendations. It is disheartening to learn that out of the 30 recommendations addressed in the government's response, eight were rejected, begging us to question the government's commitment to utilize every available strategy to effectively combat IPV in Ontario. The Ontario Association of Interval Houses' (OAITH) 2021-2022 Annual Femicide List acknowledged 52 women and girls who lost their lives to femicide during this time in Ontario, from January 1 to May 31, 2023, 24 women have been lost to IPV and countless women across this province experience the effects of abuse and violence in their close relationships on a daily basis.

One of the rejected recommendations was to formally declare IPV as an epidemic, a step that has been taken by numerous regions across the province, including: the Region of Peel, Durham Region, the Town of Oakville, Halton Region, Renfrew County and Ottawa (CBC, 23 June 2023). The goal of this recommendation is to send a clear message to government and the public that intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious social and public health issue. The refusal to highlight the severity and urgency of this issue by formally declaring IPV as an epidemic sends a deeply troubling message to the victims, survivors, and advocates who have been tirelessly working to address and eradicate IPV.

The recent publication of qualitative research published in “Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada” (Yakubovich, Steele, Moses et al, 2023) identifies four areas of focus: investment in VAW services and crisis supports, enhancement of housing and other structural supports, coordination with health, justice and social care systems, and implementation and evaluation of primary prevention, including gender transformative policy reform. Declaring IPV as an epidemic would enable all stakeholders to work alongside the government to fund and implement comprehensive measures in the context of IPV being as much a health issue as a social issue. It would also raise the profile of IPV and help to educate the public.

The rejection of other crucial recommendations, including the establishment of an independent IPV commission and the funding of safe rooms in high-risk cases, raises concerns about the government's commitment to providing effective support and resources to survivors of IPV. These measures are vital to ensure the safety and well-being of woman and gender diverse folks experiencing or at risk of intimate partner violence.

Family Service Toronto believes that concrete action and sustainable funding are urgently needed to create a comprehensive response to IPV that includes prevention, intervention, support, and accountability. Examples of concrete actions that will have impact and make women safer include increasing the supply of appropriate housing immediately for women and gender diverse folks escaping violence, ensuring available federal childcare funding is allocated to create responsive accessible childcare (Campaign 2000, February 2023), and adequately funding organizations who do this work is critical.

We respectfully request the Ontario government declare IPV an epidemic and embrace all recommendations put forth by the Renfrew County inquest's jury. It is crucial that the government takes immediate, concrete and meaningful action to address the systemic issues contributing to IPV, implement preventive measures, and support survivors in their journey to safety and healing.

Family Service Toronto urges the media and the public to join us in raising awareness about the importance of addressing IPV as a public health crisis and advocating for the implementation of evidence-based policies and initiatives that support survivors and prevent further violence.

Yakubovich A, Steele B, Moses C, Tremblay E, Arcenal M, O'Campo P, Mason R, Du Mont J, Huijbregts M, Hough L, Sim A, Shastri P, Recommendations for Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: perspectives from leaders, service providers and survivors in Canada's largest city during the COVID-19 pandemic. Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada, 2023: 43(4) <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.43.4.01>