

**AN ANALYSIS OF TRENDS CONCERNING
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
A PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY OF VANCOUVER**

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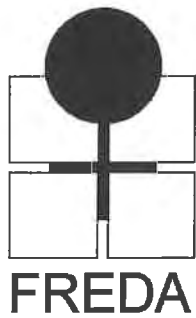
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ABSTRACT

This study has two objectives: (1) to examine the social, structural and methodological factors that may be contributing to the reported decline in the levels of domestic violence, as reflected in the statistics released by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (July 1997); and (2) to identify both those factors which may be deterring women from reporting violence to the police, and women's help-seeking behaviours vis-à-vis relationship violence. The study reviews the relevant published literature and incorporates both qualitative (focus groups, interviews) and quantitative (descriptive statistics) research methodologies into its analysis and discussion. Through examining sociological and methodological concerns that have an impact on the shaping of crime statistics, the results of this study suggest that decreases in the reported levels of domestic violence are more likely due to methodological considerations, shifts in reporting practices, and changes in legislation and police policies and practices (including antecedent conditions such as structural barriers, ideological beliefs and criminal justice professionals' perceptions of wife assault victims), than to any real reduction in the level of violence against women in relationships. An examination of the qualitative data collected for this study suggests that distrust and a lack of faith in the criminal justice system prevent many women from reporting violence to the police. Furthermore, many women fear losing custody of their children or, in some situations, their immigration status if they report their spouses to the police. Women appear to rely on a "haphazard" approach to help-seeking, and must often disclose their situations to a number of sources before they get the help they are seeking. The results of a focus group discussion indicate that professionals in criminal justice agencies, social service settings and the health field would benefit from much more training in terms of learning to recognize and effectively respond to disclosures of violence in a non-victim-blaming manner. On-going public education on the subject of relationship violence is also recommended. The study suggests that additional research in terms of analyzing the relationships between statistics for assault and other types of criminal behaviours (e.g., criminal harassment) that occur within intimate relationships would be useful. Further study in the area of women's help-seeking patterns would also yield important information for both anti-violence workers and criminal justice professionals.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent statistics released by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (July 1997) suggest that the rates of domestic violence are declining. Specifically, statistics collected from the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) indicate a 7.2 percent decline from 1993 to 1996. However, there are many factors that may have contributed to a statistical decrease in the rates of domestic violence. Some of these factors include: changes in reporting procedures due to criminal justice policy mandates and police enforcement practices; the introduction of criminal legislation such as the criminal harassment provisions in the *Criminal Code* and *Bill C-49* (1991); public perceptions and (in)tolerance of certain kinds of crime; whether, and how, the criminal justice system responds to an incident, and, perhaps most importantly, whether an incident is even reported to the police in the first place – i.e., the “dark figure” of crime. Furthermore, official statistics are shaped both by methodological procedures and considerations such as how “violence” and “intimate” are operationally defined.

In light of these considerations, one must carefully analyze statistical reports which suggest that rates of domestic violence have decreased in recent years, particularly as the research in this area has consistently demonstrated that intimate violence tends to be *under-reported* to the police (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1996; DeKeseredy and Ellis, 1995; Johnson and Sacco, 1995). According to Johnson, “the 1993 *General Social Survey* estimated that 90 percent of sexual assaults [and] 68 percent of other assaults ... in that year were not reported to the police” (cited in Johnson, 1996a:3). Further support for this observation comes from Statistics Canada’s 1993 *Violence Against Women Survey*, which found that only 14 percent of all incidents of violence are reported to the police; the inference being that 86 percent of violent incidents are *not* reported to the police. This same survey also found that 51 percent of Canadian women have experienced at least one physical or sexual assault since the age of 16, and 45 percent of women have been victimized by men known to them (Johnson and Sacco, 1995:293).

Buzawa and Buzawa note that “with the exception of cases resulting in homicides, no reliable statistics document the rate of serious domestic violence” within a U.S. context (1996:1). DeKeseredy and Ellis (1995) report similar difficulties with Canadian statistics, and go so far as to point out that higher levels of violence against women are reported to researchers¹ than to the police. To further complicate matters, Gartner (1995) suggests that even homicide rates are not as accurate as most people generally assume them to be.

According to Gartner, not all homicides appear in official statistics due to a combination of factors such as classification and reporting procedures, and difficulties in accurately determining the cause of death (1995:189). Other methodological limitations inherent in the process of collecting and classifying official crime statistics will be considered in more

¹ At least in so far as women appear to be willing to disclose their experiences to researchers. However, DeKeseredy and Ellis’s observation that “a large number of men do not publicly reveal their mistreatment of female intimates” (1995:99), could also be interpreted to suggest that self-report surveys may also under-represent the true extent of male-to-female intimate violence.

detail in Chapter 3, but it will suffice here to reiterate that such limitations must be taken into account when interpreting changes in crime rates.

As the body of research into violence against women has developed over the past two decades, it has become apparent via anecdotal evidence and alternative statistical data (e.g., crisis centres, hospitals, community-based helping agencies) that "... all kinds of violence against women [are] much more frequent than commonly believed," and that "... 'official' statistics must surely undercount the true extent of sexual assault and wife battering" (Johnson and Sacco, 1995:282). These research findings have been met with an increased commitment to addressing the issue of male-on-female intimate violence, as reflected in the earmarking of more public funds for women's services, professional education and training programs for criminal justice professionals, and a wide variety of research initiatives (Johnson and Sacco, 1995:282).

In its endeavour to contribute to the body of research on violence against women, the objectives of the present study were two-fold: (1) to examine the social, structural, and methodological factors which may be contributing to the reported decline in the levels of domestic violence within the City of Vancouver, and (2) to identify both those factors which may be deterring women from reporting cases of domestic violence to the police, and women's help-seeking patterns. These objectives were achieved through a combination of a review of the relevant empirical literature, a critical examination of the crime statistics published by Statistics Canada, and an analysis of qualitative data obtained through a focus group and telephone interviews with key informants who are front-line workers either in service providing organizations or systems such as criminal justice or health.

Chapter One consists of a literature review intended to provide some contextual background to the social and structural factors that may influence trends in the domestic violence statistics. Chapter Two describes the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used in this project. Chapter Three provides a critical analysis of the statistics in question by attempting to methodologically deconstruct the crime statistics provided through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey data banks. This chapter will also contrast official statistics with counterpoint data from other sources such as front-line service organizations. Chapter Four considers the qualitative data obtained through the focus group and interviews. This discussion will primarily consider the themes which emerged out of the focus group, vis-à-vis those factors which may impede women from reporting the violence they may be experiencing at the hands of their partners. Chapter Five will present both the conclusions that can reasonably be drawn from the results of this study, as well as any recommendations that may serve to encourage wife assault victims specifically, and the public in general, to report cases of intimate violence.

For the purposes of this study, the terms "wife assault," "domestic violence" and "intimate violence" are used interchangeably to refer to any woman in a relationship (whether married, common-law, or dating) who has been criminally victimized physically (e.g., homicide, attempted murder, all levels of assault and sexual assault), emotionally (e.g., abduction of children, criminal harassment, other threatening or intimidating behaviours defined as criminal violations against the person), or economically (e.g., damage to and/or theft of her property).

CHAPTER I: CONTEXTUALIZING THE STATISTICS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUE

Since the early 1980s, federal and provincial government responses to the issue of violence against women have been reflected both in changes – and additions – to the *Criminal Code*, as well as in the development and implementation of mandatory charging policies such as the B.C. Ministry of Attorney General's *Violence against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) Policy* (cf., Johnson, 1996a; Kong, 1997; Wilmshurst, 1997). Significant revisions to criminal law, as they relate to intimate violence, include: (1) *Bill C-127* (1983) which completely redefined sexually aggressive violations, introduced the "rape shield" provision,² and, for the first time, enabled women to charge their spouses with sexual assault; (2) *Bill C-49* (1991) which repealed the "rape shield" provisions in the *Criminal Code*, and allowed defence counsel access to the therapeutic records of complainants in sexual offence cases;³ and (3) *Bill C-126* (1993) which added the offence of criminal harassment to the *Criminal Code*.

Johnson (1996b) points out that criminal legislation and policies which have been designed not only to encourage female victims of relationship violence to report their experiences, but also to improve the criminal justice system's response to these concerns, represent a dramatic shift in terms of how the criminal justice system is expected to respond to domestic violence. Criminal justice personnel have been expected to shift from the long-held ideology that domestic violence is a private family matter,⁴ to the understanding that wife assault is in fact a threat to the social (i.e., public) order, and therefore a matter to be dealt with by the criminal justice system (Johnson, 1996b). It may well be that despite the introduction of progressive legislation and policies that recognize wife assault as a threat to public order, the underlying ideologies are pervasive and slow to change at all levels of the

² This provision changed the rules of evidence vis-à-vis sexual assault cases by restricting questions related to the victim's past sexual history (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1995:28).

³ Subsequent to the Supreme Court of Canada's 1991 decision that the rape shield provision was unconstitutional, an amendment (*Bill C-49*) to the *Criminal Code* was introduced that not only allowed questioning about the past sexual history of the plaintiff, but also allowed defence counsel to subpoena the personal records (e.g., medical, therapeutic, journals, etc.) of the plaintiff (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993:28). *Bill C-46* (1996) has recently been introduced as means of limiting defence counsel's access to such records, but it is too soon to determine whether there has been a measurable effect on the number of sexual assault cases reported to the police as a result of this legislation.

⁴ This ideological belief seems to have its origins in the view that a wife was the property of her husband and could legitimately be physically disciplined by her husband (cf., Johnson, 1996b).

criminal justice system, from the police, to the courts,⁵ to corrections. How, then, might these conflicting ideologies and expectations be played out in both criminal justice professionals' responses to reports of domestic violence incidents, and the subsequent shaping of official crime statistics on wife assault?

CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As early as 1984, the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General established the *Wife Assault Policy* in an effort to establish a coordinated response by the justice system to the issue of wife assault (Wilmschurst, 1997:1). In the intervening years, this policy has been revised and expanded into what is now known as the *Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy* (VAWIR). The VAWIR Policy has broadened the definition of relationships and recognizes that "abuse within a relationship can apply to a varied range of criminal activity, from harassing phone calls to aggravated assault," (Wilmschurst, 1997:1) and murder. The VAWIR Policy has issued very clear directives to the criminal justice system vis-à-vis implementing mandatory arrests, reducing the number of cases "stayed" by Crown counsel, issuing harsher sentences to wife assaulters, and providing victim assistance services to all victims of reported spousal assaults in order to minimize "re-victimization" of the survivor by the criminal justice system (Wilmschurst, 1997:1). In light of such a clear policy mandate, one would expect to see an *increase* in domestic violence statistics, given that the policy was specifically designed to facilitate both the process of reporting domestic violence incidents and the laying of charges in such cases. Yet, according to a 1997 release by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, this does not appear to be the case – at least within the policing jurisdiction of the City of Vancouver. On the contrary, the statistics indicate a decrease in the number of wife assaults that occurred within this jurisdiction between 1993 and 1996.

Recent empirical studies seeking to assess the implementation of mandatory arrest policies have raised questions about the ability of such policies either to eradicate the extent of intimate violence against women (via a deterrent effect on offenders), or to effectively empower the women who rely on them for protection from violent partners (Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997; Rigakos, 1997; Wilmschurst, 1997). The tragic massacre of the Gakhali family and the non-fatal shooting of Sharon Velisek⁶ by her ex-partner, both of which occurred in Vernon, BC, in 1996, further increased front-line workers' concerns about whether police forces were responding adequately to the safety needs of women in and/or leaving violent relationships. According to Jiwani and Buhagiar (1997), the British

⁵ According to Buzawa and Buzawa, in the past, both the police and prosecutors in the United States shared the same biases toward inaction vis-à-vis their responses to domestic violence cases, and would use their discretion to avoid arresting and processing domestic violence cases, respectively (1996:4).

⁶ In these widely publicized cases, both women were attacked by their partners in spite of repeatedly reporting their partners' violent behaviour to the police. Rajwar Gakhali and nine other family members were killed by her ex-partner. Sharon Velisek was stalked and shot by her ex-partner, who then shot himself. See Jiwani and Buhagiar (1997) for more details.

Columbia Ministry of Attorney General ordered a coroner's inquest into the Gakhal case in order to arrive at some explanation for the lack of police response in the face of the mandate set out in the *VAWIR Policy*: in other words, was the inaction in the Gakhal case due to a lack of education about the policy,⁷ or to some other factor – such as a situational determinant or structural barrier?

Other empirical studies conducted in British Columbia (e.g., Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997; Wilmshurst, 1997) have also indicated fluctuations in the consistent enforcement of the *VAWIR Policy* at the prosecutorial level, although the underlying reason(s) for such inconsistencies are not examined in detail in these studies. For example, the results of Wilmshurst's study suggest that while the RCMP in Penticton were willing to arrest and lay charges in domestic violence cases,⁸ as per the provisions in the *VAWIR Policy*, Crown counsel appeared to be having difficulties keeping up with the case-load, and the number of charges that resulted in a stay of proceedings increased 17 percent between 1992 and 1994 (1997:28). Unfortunately, Wilmshurst does not examine the reasons for the increase in the percentage of cases stayed, nor does she consider the implications of this increase in the number of cases "stayed" for subsequent police responses to domestic violence cases.

As the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system, the police play a significant role in determining not only whether incidences of violence against women in relationships are likely to come to the attention of anyone else in the criminal justice system, but also whether such incidents are likely to be reflected in official crime statistics. The literature in this area suggests that police responses are influenced by factors such as discretion, situational factors, attitudes and perceptions about wife assault victims, and structural barriers (cf., Hannah-Moffat, 1995; Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997; Johnson, 1996b; Rigakos, 1995, 1997).

SITUATIONAL DETERMINANTS THAT IMPACT ON POLICE RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As Johnson points out, a high degree of discretion and professional judgment are integral components of effective policing (1996b:27). It would appear that police officers continue to rely on their own discretion and judgment in order to determine whether a criminal offence has in fact occurred and whether charges should be laid, even where mandatory arrest policies have purportedly limited police discretion in terms of arresting offenders in wife assault cases (Hannah-Moffat, 1995). The legal criteria, as set out in the *Criminal Code*, for determining whether a charge should be laid are whether there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that an offence occurred; however, there appears to be some

⁷ For example, in a Toronto study on police officers' perceptions of mandatory arrest policies, 11 of the 17 officers interviewed indicated that they had only received an average of 1.5 hours of training about wife abuse issues and pro-arrest policies in domestic violence cases (Hannah-Moffat, 1995:36).

⁸ As reflected in an increase from 72 percent of cases in 1992 to 78 percent of cases in 1994 (see Wilmshurst, 1997:28).

latitude by individual officers as to their interpretation of what constitutes reasonable grounds (Hannah-Moffat, 1995:37). Most police officers tend to look for tangible evidence – such as signs of a struggle or the availability of a witness – or an intent to hurt, in addition to the physical action of hitting a female partner in order to satisfy the “reasonable and probable grounds” criteria. But other officers also consider the type of abuse alleged, the demeanour of the victim and offender toward the police officer, and the credibility of the victim (Hannah-Moffat, 1995:37-38).

Rigakos’ (1997) research on police responses to, and the enforcement of, civil and criminal injunctions for battered women reflect similar findings in terms of the criteria used to arrest a male partner who has violated a restraining order. According to Rigakos (1997), the criteria used by police to determine whether an arrest should be made in these situations seem to have very little bearing on the requests of the female complainants in such cases. In fact, of the twelve factors that the police considered to be important determinants of arrest in such cases, a victim’s request that her partner (or ex-partner) be arrested was ranked in sixth place (Rigakos, 1997:213). Among the most important factors that influenced a decision to arrest were signs of forced entry and signs of a struggle (Rigakos, 1997:213) – that is, “tangible evidence” that an offence had occurred.

Discretion and professional judgment are also accompanied, in any situation, by an officer’s personal values and beliefs about what constitutes wife assault, as opposed to a mere “domestic dispute” (Johnson, 1996b:27). It is reasonable to expect that, on occasion, personal values may influence an officer’s perceptions of an event and the criteria used to determine whether there are reasonable and probable grounds for laying criminal charges (Hannah-Moffat, 1995; Johnson, 1996b). For example, Rigakos’ (1997) research on police responses to, and the enforcement of, civil and criminal injunctions for battered women suggests that police officers are often reluctant to enforce restraining orders in domestic violence cases, possibly as a result of adhering to earlier “recipe rules” that instruct police officers to “deal with these situations [i.e., interpersonal conflict between intimate partners] by means other than the criminal law” (Ericson, 1982:113, cited in Rigakos, 1997:210). At a deeper level of analysis, it would appear that these “recipe rules” have emerged out of an occupational subculture which shapes police officers’ ideologies about, and perceptions of, domestic violence cases (Rigakos, 1995). Such recipe rules reflect earlier beliefs that a police officer’s “primary role in domestic violence cases was to calm the people involved and restore order” (Johnson, 1996b:210).

Rigakos’ (1995) analysis suggests that many police officers are still socialized⁹ into a patriarchal ideology which relegates domestic violence to a “private sphere”¹⁰ that ought to remain outside of the realm of criminal (public) justice intervention (1995). Furthermore, according to Rigakos (1995), the prevalence of conservative attitudes among some police

⁹ This would suggest that the longer an individual has been part of this occupational subculture, the more entrenched would be the concomitant ideologies.

¹⁰ See the discussion on page 3 of this report.

officers has given rise to the construction of a “symbolic complainant” in wife assault cases, wherein the victim is not only perceived to be unreliable and manipulative, but is also held responsible for the violence inflicted on her. Rigakos’ analyses (1995, 1997) imply that such attitudes might carry over to police responses to wife assault cases in general, and not just in situations involving breaches of restraining orders. Other research (Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997) suggests that this is, indeed, the case – at least from the perspective of some front-line workers in the anti-violence movement. However, other front-line workers indicated that not only are younger officers more inclined to adhere to the *VAWIR Policy*, but they are also “generally more receptive to hearing the woman’s side of the story” (Jiwani & Buhagiar, 1997:27). These observations suggest a more positive outlook for the future in terms of police officers’ understanding of and attitudes toward violence against women in relationships.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO RESPONDING TO RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

In addition to situational determinants and ideologies that may influence criminal justice responses to incidents of relationship violence, there may also be a lack of sufficient resources to adequately keep up with the demands of the *VAWIR Policy*, not to mention other structural expectations and limitations imposed on criminal justice personnel. For example, financial cutbacks in some police agencies may well diminish their ability to respond to criminal incidents, let alone accurately document these incidents and report them to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Kong, 1997:2). This is illustrated in a recent news story in *The Vancouver Sun* which indicated that “BC police agencies failed to report more than 2400 cases or 70 percent of all homicides, sexual assaults, abductions and ... other crimes to ViCLAS [Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System¹¹]” (Kines, 1998:A1). Admittedly, these data are geared to tracking and solving serial violent offenders, but the inability to maintain a database as a result of insufficient resources could just as easily affect reporting of statistics to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS). Even an event such as a civic labour dispute can affect the reporting of criminal incidents if the dispute impedes access to record-keeping facilities. For example, the 1994 labour dispute by City of Vancouver employees resulted in a decrease in the reporting of crime statistics by the Vancouver Police Department (Holm and Taylor, 1994). The total number of incidents pertaining to violence and intimidation against women in relationships dropped from 1,939 in 1993, to 1,090 in 1994.¹²

Organizational imperatives and priorities, as well as the criteria used for judging “effectiveness” may also serve as impediments to consistently following the directives set

¹¹ A computer system for tracking serial killers and rapists within the province.

¹² Aggregate statistics for the years 1993 to 1996 were supplied by the Vancouver Police Department in response to a request for such data by the researcher. The Vancouver Police Department also publishes yearly reports on relationship violence; however these reports only provide a sample of data for two months per year (cf., Holm and Taylor, 1994; Sabourin and Taylor, 1995).

out in mandatory arrest policies. According to Buzawa, Austin, and Buzawa, “organizational imperatives ... drive police officers to spend time on cases that are likely to lead to convictions” (1996:154). Since domestic violence cases are not generally perceived as meeting this criteria, many police departments in the United States believe that having officers spend a lot of time processing domestic violence cases is a waste of time and not in keeping with their official mission – and priority – to maintain public order and authority (Buzawa, Austin and Buzawa, 1996:153-154). Canadian police officers’ responses to domestic violence incidents are also shaped by their knowledge of the “kinds of cases Crown prosecutors have set as priorities ... what kind of evidence is required to secure a conviction ... and what priorities have been established by their own departments” (Johnson, 1996b:27). Apparently, dispatchers are often under the same directives, regarding police department priorities; consequently, dispatchers may not forward certain calls for assistance if they do not meet with departmental criteria (Jaffe, Hastings, Reitzel, and Austin, 1993, cited in Johnson, 1996b:27). Consequently, if reducing violence against women in relationships is not recognized as being a high priority within a policing jurisdiction, little energy will be put into either responding to wife assault calls, or developing contacts and liaisons with other anti-violence and women-serving agencies within the community.

VICTIM-BASED PATTERNS OF REPORTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS

According to Johnson, a filtering process takes place before the police are even made aware that a violent offence has occurred – or is occurring. The victim (or a witness) must first perceive the violent behaviour as criminal and then decide whether it is appropriate to report the incident to the police (1996b:27). Recent empirical studies (e.g., Johnson, 1996a; Johnson, 1996b; Statistics Canada, 1994; Suleman and McLarty, 1997) suggest that many women who experience violence do not report these incidents to the police. According to Johnson, the social relationship between the victim and offender has a significant impact on the decision to report an incident to the police: “The closer the relationship between the victim and the offender, the more likely the event is to go unreported” (1996a:3). Indeed, many women endure numerous assaults of a serious nature (i.e., the women were choked, severely beaten or had a weapon used against them) before they finally decide to seek help from the criminal justice system (Johnson, 1996b:208). Furthermore, spousal sexual assaults are even less likely to be reported than non-sexual spousal assaults¹³ (Johnson, 1996b). The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women suggests that this is because “the closer the relationship, the greater the burden of proof of injury required by the woman” (1993:25). Feelings of guilt, confusion, shame, and embarrassment also prevent many women from reporting that they have been sexually assaulted by an intimate partner (Johnson, 1996b).

¹³ Cf., Figures 2.3 and 2.4 in Johnson’s book *Dangerous Domains* (1996:52-53).

In her research on battered women and the criminal justice system, Hart (1996) lists a number of reasons why battered women often wish to withdraw their cooperation and/or the charges against their partners, including: fear of retaliation and increased violence in the future; fear of being abandoned by their social support network; reluctance to expose the father of their children to public accountability; economic concerns; systemic barriers imposed by criminal justice personnel; and feeling re-victimized by the criminal justice system due to victim-blaming attitudes, insensitivity and/or indifference on the part of criminal justice professionals. Canadian empirical research suggests that many of these same reasons prevent women from reporting incidents of spousal abuse to the police in the first place (cf., DeKeseredy and Ellis, 1995; Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997). Jiwani and Buhagiar (1997) report that women from a wide cross-section of economic and ethnocultural backgrounds who have been abused by their partners are often reluctant to request help from the police, particularly if the women fear the possibility of deportment or immigration problems (Jiwani and Buhagiar, 1997).

In other situations, women who have been willing to cooperate with the police and prosecutor in an effort to secure a conviction against their abusive partners have met with resistance to charging the offender (Hart, 1996). Data from the Canadian *Violence Against Women Survey* indicate that police intervention in wife battering and sexual assault cases seldom resulted in criminal charges being laid against the perpetrator: of the 26 percent of wife assault cases that were reported to the police, only 28 percent of those cases resulted in criminal charges (Statistics Canada, 1993, cited in Johnson, 1996b:211). However, it should also be pointed out that in those cases where charges were laid, 79 percent of them proceeded to court (Statistics Canada, 1993, cited in Johnson, 1996b:212).

According to Hart, police departments in the United States routinely classify domestic assaults as misdemeanours “even though the criminal conduct involved actually included bodily injury as serious or more serious than 90 percent of all rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults” (Langman and Innes, 1986, cited in Hart, 1996:102). Although there is no research to confirm whether this type of offence reclassification occurs within Canadian police departments and Crown counsel offices, the charging process – which is ultimately controlled by Crown – is still likely to be influenced by factors such as police discretion, the evidence available to support a charge, and, possibly, a focus on pursuing those charges that are most likely to result in a conviction – even when that means charging the offender with a less serious offence.

Women may also become discouraged from reporting domestic assaults if they feel that their experiences are being trivialized and downplayed by the criminal justice system (Hart, 1996). Anecdotal data¹⁴ from this study suggest that women have, at various times, experienced similar responses from the police in Vancouver. Yet, the tendency to trivialize the seriousness of an assault does not occur when the incident takes place between

¹⁴ Based on telephone interviews, and a focus group with front-line workers and individuals from the health and criminal justice systems.

strangers (Buzawa, Austin, and Buzawa, 1996). Indeed, a police officer who participated in the focus group for this study indicated that generally, in the past, more energy was put into incidents of stranger assault than into domestic violence cases, even though it is well known that women are more likely to be assaulted by someone known to them than by a stranger. Although he did not elaborate on why this was the case, he did offer some hope that wife assault incidents are now also being investigated more thoroughly.

This chapter has identified and discussed a number of antecedent social and structural factors that affect criminal justice responses to violence against women and may subsequently have an impact on official wife assault statistics. Johnson suggests that these various factors “combine to influence the discretion of both the victim and the individual officer who responds to a complaint” and that “each can have a significant impact on the official rates of violence recorded by the police ...” (1996b:28). Following a discussion of the methodology used in this study, additional considerations will be identified and analyzed in Chapter 3 in an attempt to deconstruct the violence statistics published in a July 1997 release by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

In light of its two-fold objectives, this study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and data analyses that reflect a critical theoretical perspective. Due to significant ethical concerns attached to interviewing survivors of abusive relationships – specifically, the risk of re-traumatizing women by asking them to re-tell their experiences – qualitative data in the form of a focus group and telephone interviews with front-line workers and other key informants were used as a means of identifying women's help-seeking patterns, and those factors that prevent or discourage women from reporting intimate violence to the police. As such, the limitations of this "second-hand" knowledge of women's help-seeking patterns should be taken into account when reading the analysis of the qualitative data. Quantitative data in the form of aggregate statistics collected from participating agencies in the study were also employed in the critical analysis – and deconstruction – of the police statistics compiled by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (1997).

QUALITATIVE DATA

PRELIMINARY STEPS

Prior to collecting the data for this project, a small sample of key players in the anti-violence movement, criminal justice, and health systems were identified as potential participants in the study. Based on what was known about each of these players and key informants, sets of interview questions were designed to capture their observations about domestic violence trends between the years 1993 and 1996 and, where appropriate, their observations of women's help-seeking patterns vis-à-vis disclosures of domestic violence to sources other than the police. A set of questions for the focus group was also designed and tailored primarily to front-line service providers.

SAMPLE

Ten key informants (see list of participating organizations in Appendix A) were contacted by phone and letter to solicit their interest in the research project. All key informants were asked: (a) whether their organizations kept aggregate statistics on relationship violence for the years 1993-1996; (b) whether it would be possible to gain access to copies of their agency's statistics; and (c) whether they would be interested in participating either in a telephone interview, or in a focus group, conducted during the first week of May in a meeting room at the downtown campus of Simon Fraser University. Telephone interviews were also included as an option in light of time constraints on the parts of both participants and the researcher.

Five organizations provided copies of their aggregate statistics for the years 1993-1996. Representatives from the following organizations participated in the focus group: a police officer from the Vancouver Police Department (Domestic Violence/Criminal Harassment Unit); a counsellor from Family Services of Greater Vancouver; a front-line worker from Immigrant Services Society; a research associate from the FREDa Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children; and a representative from the British Columbia

and Yukon Association of Transition Houses. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with a social worker at St. Paul's Hospital, and a front-line worker from a rape crisis centre.

PROCEDURE

Participants who attended the focus group were provided with a copy of the questions prior to the actual session. Additional copies of the questions were available on the day of the focus group. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent document. They were also told that the session would be taped for the purpose of analyzing the discussion thematically. As the moderator of the focus group, the researcher limited her role to introducing the questions to be discussed, taking brief notes (as a back up to the tape), and observing the interactions between participants. Questions were open-ended in an effort to facilitate the maximum degree of interaction between participants.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The data supplied to Statistics Canada are critiqued both in terms of the antecedent factors which impede reporting (as discussed in the previous chapter), and on methodological grounds. Specifically, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how certain methodological practices may limit the number of reported cases officially defined as spousal assault. The data compiled by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) is compared with aggregate statistics from other sources such as the coroner's office, community-based service providers, and hospital-based programs. The purpose of this comparison is not only to highlight a contrast between police data and other resources that women may turn to for help, but also to use the counterpoint data as alternative measures of the level of violence against women in Vancouver. Additional data from the Vancouver Police Department and from the Police Services Division are also considered for comparative purposes, particularly as there are some noteworthy differences – in terms of numbers and definitions – between these sources and the statistics submitted to the CCJS by the Vancouver Police Department.

RECORDING AND HANDLING OF DATA

The focus group, which lasted one-and-one-half hours, was taped and then transcribed and thematized. The data were analyzed according to the themes that emerged out of the discussion, and the questions directed to focus group participants. The analysis of the qualitative data, and where possible, direct quotes from the focus group members have been incorporated into the discussion in the following sections of this report.

In keeping with the ethical practices of social research, the following steps have been taken. First, signed consent forms were filed in a secure location, separate from the other research materials for this project. Second, participants' names have been deleted both from the transcript of the focus group and the text of this report. Only a list of the participating organizations is included in this project. Finally, the original data for the study (i.e., the cassette tape and interview schedules), and the initial contact letters were destroyed upon completion of the project.

CHAPTER III: DECONSTRUCTING THE STATISTICS

In order to make sense of domestic violence statistics, it is necessary to ask a number of questions, including: How is the term “spouse” defined? What criminal actions are considered to be reflective of intimate violence? What methodological practices shape the data (e.g., how are criminal incidents “counted” for statistical purposes, and what is the population size of the area being considered)? Have there been any recent changes to criminal justice legislation that may influence patterns of reporting or charging procedures? Have there been changes in the patterns of reporting offences to the police?

DEFINITIONS

When analyzing the statistics on violence against women in relationships, two constructs must be examined in terms of definitions: (1) what do we mean by the terms “intimate” or “spouse”?; and (2) what range of behaviours are included in the concept of violence?

DEFINING “INTIMATE”

Perhaps because of the changing nature and structure of social relationships, “spouse” has come to be defined as a partner to whom a woman is married either legally or through common-law. DeKeseredy and Ellis define a “wife” as “any woman who is legally married or is sexually and emotionally linked to a male cohabitor” (1995:100). The term “partner” is often more broadly defined to include a current or estranged intimate partner (of either sex), and dating relationships (cf., Holm & Taylor, 1994). Both the Police Services Division of the BC Ministry of Attorney General¹⁵ (1997) and the Vancouver Police Department (Richard and Taylor, 1996) employ a broad definition of intimate violence that includes both dating relationships/intimate partnerships in which the partners are not co-habiting, and same-sex relationships. It is not clear from the Statistics Canada report how broadly the term “partner” is being defined for the purposes of measuring the extent of intimate violence. However, if one assumes that Statistics Canada includes only legal and common-law spouses in heterosexual relationships for the purposes of coding wife assaults, then the number of cases reflected in the statistics will be smaller than the number of domestic violence incidents actually recorded by the Vancouver Police Department and must be taken into account accordingly.

¹⁵ British Columbia’s *Family Relations Act* has also recently been amended to incorporate a broader definition of the term “spouse.” (*Bill-31, Family Relations Amendment Act*, s.1, (c) (6), 36th Parliament, 2nd Legislative Session.)

DETERMINING THE SCOPE OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE

DeKeseredy and Ellis point out that within the social-scientific study of violence against women in relationships, “there is considerable disagreement over what acts should be included in definitions of this variant of female victimization” (1995:99). Intimate violence has been defined either so broadly as to include “anything a male spouse has done or not done to his partner that is perceived as psychologically, socially, economically, or physically harmful” (Stark-Adamek and Adamek, 1982, cited in DeKeseredy and Ellis, 1995:99), or in narrow terms that comprise only sub-lethal assaults and sexual assaults, as defined in the *Criminal Code*. While most researchers acknowledge that all forms of abuse are damaging to a woman, for research purposes violence is generally defined as sub-lethal acts of physical or sexual violence (DeKeseredy and Ellis, 1995). This definition also has its limits in that it does not include femicide, the most extreme form of physical violence, nor does it include indirect threats and intimidating behaviours as reflected in the commission of property crimes such as mischief, breaking and entering, or theft.

These definitional disagreements are also reflected in official statistics. For example, the Police Services Division of the BC Ministry of Attorney General includes a wide variety of offences in its data on intimate violence. In its report titled *Police and Crime: Summary Statistics, 1987-1996* (1997), the Police Services Division includes the following offences, in addition to assault (Levels 1, 2, and 3) and sexual assault (Levels 1, 2, and 3), under the category of spousal assault incidents: murder 1, murder 2, manslaughter, attempted murder, robbery, abduction of a child under 14, property, and other *Criminal Code* offences. The Vancouver Police Department also includes any offence (ranging from assault, to murder, to credit card theft, to harassment and threats) that falls “under the broad realm of ‘violence and/or intimidation’ against women” (Holm & Taylor, 1994:i). By way of contrast, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics’ report *Canadian Crime Statistics, 1996* (Kong, 1997) includes only assaults and sexual assaults (all levels) in its measurements of intimate violence, yet the same report acknowledges that “[t]he majority of victims [of criminal harassment]¹⁶ continue to be women harassed by either a current or previous husband or boyfriend, or a male acquaintance” (1997:7). Furthermore, in a separate *Juristat* report on homicide statistics, Fedorowycz (1997), a Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics researcher, notes that 62 women were killed by current or former spouses in 1996. According to Fedorowycz, “about 40 percent of female homicide victims were killed by someone with whom they had an intimate relationship with at some point in time” (1997:1).

In light of these figures, reporting only the combined levels of assault and sexual assault under the category of wife assault drastically reduces the scope of violence against women in relationships. Furthermore, a limited focus on assault and sexual assault only tells us that certain types of violence against women have decreased or increased: It does not allow

¹⁶ Criminal harassment, or “stalking” is defined as “repeatedly following, watching or communicating with a person or someone known to them in a way that causes them to fear for their safety or for the safety of someone known to them” (Kong, 1996:7).

for a comparison with other types of criminal offences that are committed against women by their partners or ex-partners – perhaps in an effort to directly or indirectly threaten or harass the victims. By including a broader array of offences related to intimate violence, the crime statistics would give a much clearer picture of the nature and extent of violence against women in relationships. For example, many women, particularly if they are separated from their partners, appear to be at risk of being subjected to criminal harassment and stalking, rather than to physical and sexual assaults, as a form of relationship violence. According to Vancouver Police Department data (Sabourin and Taylor, 1996), 27 cases of criminal harassment, 87 cases of harassing/threatening phone calls, and 35 cases of threats by ex-partners were reported to the police in 1995, compared to the 6 cases of criminal harassment (3 spouse, 3 common-law), 18 harassing/threatening phone calls (9 spouse, 9 common-law), and 36 instances of threats (20 spouse, 16 common-law), committed by current partners, respectively. It is noteworthy that property and theft offences are also more likely to be committed by ex-partners than by current partners (whether married or common-law). Although these figures are gender neutral, it should be pointed out that when broken down by gender, the data consistently indicate that 90 percent of these offences are committed by males.¹⁷

By way of contrast, women currently with a partner are more likely to be the victims of Level 1 and Level 2 assaults.¹⁸ Using this estimate, in 1995, 97 Level 2 assaults were committed by spouses and common-law partners each, compared to 33 Level 2 assaults committed by ex-partners. A similar pattern is indicated in a 1996 Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics report by Rebecca Kong, titled *Criminal Harassment*. According to the data in this report, of the 4,046 female victims of criminal harassment, 38.6 percent of the women were stalked by their ex-spouses, 17 percent were stalked by ex-boyfriends, and fewer than 2 percent of the women were harassed by spouses or partners with whom they were still involved (p. 5). For 1994-1995 crime data, 25 percent of criminal harassment cases also involved other offences such as uttering threats, assault, threatening phone-calls, mischief, break and enter, and sexual assault (Kong, 1996:5). The specific methodological rules that are applied to the process of reporting incidents involving more than one offence – and therefore have certain implications for interpreting crime statistics – are discussed below.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

In addition to determining how intimate violence is defined and which criminal activities officially “count” as reflections of violence/intimidation in relationships, an understanding of the methodology employed to compile crime statistics is also helpful in determining how

¹⁷ Telephone conversation with a member of the Vancouver Police Department. Also see the reports on *Violence and/or Intimidation Against Women in Relationships* for the years 1994, 1995, and 1996.

¹⁸ Assaults are classified into three levels, depending on the level of seriousness. Level 1 is a “minor” assault, Level 2 comprises assaults causing bodily harm or assaults with weapons, and Level 3 refers to aggravated assault.

criminal incidents are scored, as well as the number of criminal incidents that are actually included in the official statistics.

COUNTING CRIMES

Counting crimes occurs at two levels. First of all, a distinction must be made between the total number of incidents reported to the police and the number of actual offences – crimes that have been substantiated through investigation. Unfounded reports are not reported in the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey data. A case may be designated as unfounded, and therefore excluded from the official statistics: if there is insufficient evidence to support a charge; if the victim refuses to give a statement (and her statement is the only evidence available); or if a situation is contrary to the mandates set out in the particular wife assault policy adhered to by police departments within a specific jurisdiction.¹⁹ For example, data from the Vancouver Police Department for the month of January, 1996, show that out of a total of 118 cases, 29 cases (approximately 25 percent) were unfounded (Richard and Taylor, 1996).

From a methodological perspective, it makes sense to exclude unfounded reports from official crime statistics, however the exclusion of this data may potentially be dangerous in terms of under-representing certain types of crime. It is also important to bear in mind that an “unfounded” report does not mean that the offence did not actually happen – particularly as, in many cases, the reasons for “unfounding” a report pertain to factors such as officer’s discretion and perceptions of the victim, rather than whether an offence actually occurred (Johnson, 1996b:28). Given that both the empirical literature (cf., Buzawa, Austin & Buzawa, 1996; Johnson, 1996b) and the anecdotal data collected for this project indicate that domestic violence incidents are often trivialized and perhaps not investigated as thoroughly as they ought to be, it is probably safe to assume that the less thoroughly an incident is investigated, the greater the likelihood there is of it being written off as “unfounded.”²⁰

Second, an incident may involve numerous offences of varying degrees of seriousness. According to the Revised UCR, a maximum of four offences can be reported for any one incident, and it is generally the most serious violation of the four offences that is reflected in the statistics (Kong, 1996:12). For example, in a domestic violence incident including criminal harassment, uttering threats and a Level 1 assault, only the most serious of these offences would be included in the survey data. Since all three crimes are violations against the person, the next criterion for inclusion addressed would be: which offence has the greatest maximum penalty? Hypothetically, if uttering threats had a greater maximum

¹⁹ See Holm and Taylor (1994) for more details.

²⁰ This perspective is from a front-line worker in a rape crisis centre. According to this informant, police often arrive late at the scene of a wife assault, thereby reducing the likelihood of finding any reasonable grounds to arrest the offender (Interview Respondent #2).

penalty than a Level 1 assault or criminal harassment, then the incident would be reflected as uttering threats, rather than as an assault. Continuing with this example, if all three offences carried the same maximum penalties,²¹ then it would be up to the police department's discretion to determine which of the three crimes would qualify as the most serious offence. In light of these methodological rules, it would appear that the attending officers' perceptions of the event and their abilities to make accurate judgment calls about the seriousness of an assault could have a significant impact on shaping the crime statistics. How does one determine, based on the injuries sustained by the victim, whether an assault should be charged as Level 1 or Level 2? At what point might a Level 3 assault or sexual assault more accurately be referred to as attempted murder – an offence that is not included in the wife assault statistics?

Furthermore, according to Kong (1997:4), an assault consisting of a threat, or threatening behaviour, may be reported under *Criminal Code* sections other than Section 266. Again, the interpretation of an assault as another type of criminal violation would have some bearing on the true numbers of spousal assaults that have occurred within a given year. Indeed, a break down of the Vancouver Police Department's statistics on violence and intimidation against women in relationships by categories of offences shows that, on average, criminal harassment and other threatening types of behaviour comprise about 15 percent of all reported spousal-related incidents in any given year (see Table 1).

Table 1: Relationship Violence by Category of Offence

Type of Offence (By Category) ¹	1993	1994	1995	1996
Assault and Sexual Assault	1252 (65%)	733 (67%)	981 (70%)	1206 (66%)
Criminal Harassment	1 (–)	16 (1%)	33 (2%)	51 (3%)
Threats/Intimidating Behaviours²	305 (16%)	162 (15%)	197 (14%)	227 (15%)
Property Offences³	320 (17%)	167 (15%)	167 (12%)	267 (15%)

1. These figures include male and female offenders; however, in spousal assaults, males generally account for approximately 85 to 90 percent of the offenders (BC Ministry of Attorney General, 1996; Vancouver Police Department, 1998). Source of data: Vancouver Police Department (1998).

2. Includes extortion.

3. Includes robbery.

[Total number of incidents per year: 1,939 (1993), 1,090 (1994), 1,402 (1995), 1,785 (1996).]

²¹ In fact, criminal harassment and minor assaults (Level 1) carry the same maximum penalties (Kong, 1996:6).

THE EFFECT OF NEW LEGISLATION ON REPORTING AND CHARGING PROCEDURES

It is a given that changes in legislation, policies, and police enforcement practices are likely to have some impact on police reported statistics (Kong, 1997:2); however, it is important to determine whether these influences are likely to increase or decrease the numbers reflected in the statistics, and the magnitude of any such changes. In other words, how much of this change is attributable to an actual shift in trends and how much is due to the effects of the new legislation or procedure(s) that have been implemented.

For example, after the new sexual assault provision came into effect in 1983, “in the years after [its] implementation, the number of incidents of assault and sexual assault reported to the police rose dramatically” (Kong, 1997:2). This was, in large measure, due to changes in the evidentiary burdens which would make it easier to prove that an offence had occurred. However, with the introduction of *Bill C-49* in 1991, the number of reported sexual assaults began to decline after complainants found themselves being “re-victimized” in the court process due to defence counsel’s relatively easy access to complainants’ records that were assumed to be confidential. The implementation of *Bill C-46* in 1996 was intended to rectify this issue; however some sources (e.g., Cunningham and Griffiths, 1997) imply that based on lower-level court decisions,²² the Bill may not be all that effective in protecting complainants and, in the meantime, may be affecting the number of reported sexual assaults.²³

The introduction of criminal harassment legislation, as discussed previously, may also have an impact on statistics for wife assault, particularly if a charge of harassment is more likely to result in a conviction than a charge of assault. Although criminal harassment and minor assaults are comparable vis-à-vis their levels of seriousness, it would appear that criminal harassment is perceived as being the more serious of the two offences (Kong, 1996:6, 8); therefore a case involving both harassment and assault charges would most likely be recorded as an incident of criminal harassment, rather than assault. In light of these considerations, perhaps it is not so much that the level of intimate violence against women (at least as measured by assaults and sexual assaults) has actually decreased since 1993, but rather that many of these Level 1 assaults and sexual assaults have been *reinterpreted* as criminal harassment since the introduction of this particular offence into the *Criminal Code* in 1993.

It is clear from the 1996 crime statistics that the number of incidents reported as criminal harassment have been increasing – from 2,840 incidents in 1994 to 3,313 incidents in 1996 – since the legislation was introduced (see Kong, 1997:7). What is less clear, based on the

²² According to Cunningham and Griffiths (1997), an Alberta Court of Queen’s Bench decision ruled that *Bill C-46* violates a defendant’s right to a fair trial and is therefore unconstitutional.

²³ Although, most likely, the introduction of *Bill C-46* would not have had any effect on the data being considered in the current study.

available data, is whether this is a result of reclassifying certain offences – for example, assaults or threats – as criminal harassment, or whether there is an increasing trend toward harassing behaviours in the context of intimate violence. The data seem to indicate that most criminal harassment is perpetrated by ex-partners rather than current partners. A perusal of data from the Vancouver Police Department²⁴ shows that the numbers for the specific offence of criminal harassment tripled over a three year period (1994-1996) after the introduction of the criminal harassment provisions, which suggests that at least some assaults and threatening/intimidating behaviours were reclassified as harassment, despite the fact that the totals for the general category of threatening/intimidating behaviours, as a percent of all domestic violence related incidents, have remained fairly constant over the same time period.²⁵

In light of previous researchers' comments that changes in policies and police enforcement practices are sometimes reflected as an increase in the crime statistics (e.g., Johnson, 1996a; Kong, 1997), the apparently declining rates of assault and sexual assault within relationships seems incongruous within the context of the *VAWIR Policy*. Specifically, one would expect that a policy aimed at encouraging women to report intimate violence through improving criminal justice responses to violence against women in relationships would have the effect of increasing the number of incidents reported to the police. According to Kingsley, (1996:1, cited in Johnson, 1996a:4), elevated rates of assault throughout the 1980s were at least partly due to mandatory arrest policies that had been implemented across the country during that same time period. Yet, the statistics for Vancouver and the Greater Vancouver area fluctuate only slightly, or show a small decrease, in the latter case (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Spousal Assault Incidents (Male Offenders), 1993-1996

	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Greater Vancouver¹	911	948	892	909	3660
City of Vancouver²	969	978	893	899	3739

Sources: (1) BC Ministry of Attorney General (1997); (2) Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (1997).

However, when one examines the statistics for the province of BC, there are slight increases between 1993 and 1996, both for the number of male offenders and for the total number of spousal assault incidents (see Table 3).

²⁴ Keeping in mind that these data, although they record all incidents of domestic violence, will also reflect concerns about the under-reporting certain types of offences.

²⁵ See Table 1 of this report.

Table 3: Number of Spousal Assaults* in BC, 1993-1996

	1993	1994	1995	1996
All Offenders	8994	9475	9046	9274
Male Offenders	7271	7678	7286	7567

Source: Police Services Division, BC Ministry of Attorney General (1997).

*Combined totals for assaults (Levels 1, 2, and 3) and sexual assaults (Levels 1, 2, and 3).

According to the BC Ministry of Attorney General, “the number of *reported* [emphasis added] spousal assaults increased by approximately 11 percent per year,” with the numbers levelling off after 1994 (1997:43). The increase in reports of intimate violence is attributed in part to the *VAWIR Policy* (1997:41), and in part to the finding that spousal assaults accounted for almost 25 percent of all Level 1 non-sexual assaults in 1996 (1997:42). In light of these other sources of data, the figures presented by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics seem all the more puzzling. Why would the number of reported wife assaults in the City of Vancouver show a decrease between 1993 and 1996, when the same pattern does not seem to be reflected at the provincial level, or even for just the greater Vancouver area? Furthermore, Table 1 shows that between 1993 and 1995 there is a slight *increase* in the proportion of assaults,²⁶ compared to other types violent or intimidating behaviours that occur within intimate relationships.

It is also noteworthy that aggregate statistics from a rape crisis centre reflect an increase – from 29 percent of the total calls in 1993 to 43 percent of calls in 1996 – in wife assaults as a proportion of the total number of calls received vis-à-vis incidents of male attacks on females (see Table 4 and Figure 1, below).

Table 4: Rape Relief Statistics, 1993-1996

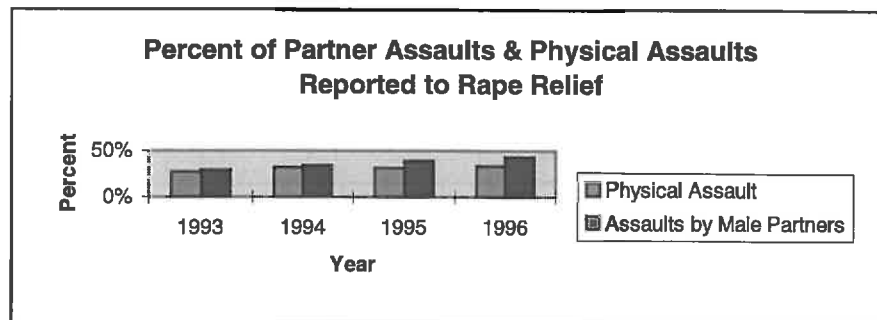
	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total # Calls Reporting Male Violence	1505	1439	1191	1284
# Attacks by Partners/Ex-partners	440	488	470	558
# Calls about Physical Attacks	407	460	374	433

Source: Vancouver Rape Relief; Vancouver, BC (1998).

²⁶ Refer to page 17 of this report.

Table 4 clearly shows that while the total number of calls to the centre also decreased between 1993 and 1996, the number of calls about attacks by male partners – or ex-partners – increased during the same time period. Expressed as a percentage of the total calls received by this agency between 1993 and 1996, the figures are 29, 34, 39, and 43 percent, respectively. Figure 1 shows that over the same time period, the percentage of calls regarding attacks by male partners slightly exceeded the percentage of calls received about physical assaults (by strangers): 27, 32, 31, and 33 percent for the years 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996 respectively.

Figure 1: Percent of Partner Assaults & Physical Assaults Reported to Rape Relief



Source: Vancouver Rape Relief, (1998).

TRENDS IN THE NATURE OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE

Although the number of wife assaults in the City of Vancouver appears to have decreased between 1993 and 1996, the figures listed in Table 1 show that across a wider category of offences, the numbers start increasing again in 1996.²⁷ Furthermore, although the *number* of spousal assaults decreased between 1993 and 1995, assaults accounted for a *greater proportion* of relationship violence for the same time period, as reflected in both the police data and the statistics from Vancouver Rape Relief (1998).

The number of sexual assaults reported to the police remains low. According to 1996 crime statistics (Kong, 1997), sexual assaults accounted for 10 percent of violent crimes in 1996.²⁸ The key to understanding this statistic is that it represents the *reported* number of incidents of sexual assault. An analysis of the data from the Vancouver Police Department shows that although the numbers of reported sexual assaults by a current or former

²⁷ A methodological issue that must be addressed here is that a category of offender identified as “close friend” was excluded from the 1995 data, which might account for the smaller numbers in 1995. It is not possible to determine whether offenders fitting into this category were simply incorporated into some other category, or whether there is some other reason for this exclusion.

²⁸ The same report also indicates that male offenders accounted for 98 percent of the sexual assaults reported to the police (Kong, 1997).

heterosexual²⁹ spouse or intimate partner have fluctuated between 1993 and 1996 – with as many as 76 cases in 1993 and as few as 22 cases in 1995 – the percent of reported sexual assaults by male partners or spouses remains at less than five percent per year (see Table 5).

Table 5: Sexual Assaults Reported to the Vancouver Police Department

	1993	1994	1995	1996
# Domestic Violence Incidents¹	1745	981	1262	1607
# Sexual Assaults	76	42	22	54
Percent of Domestic Violence Incidents	4	4	2	3

Source: Vancouver Police Department (1998).

1. These figures are 90% of the original totals (1939, 1090, 1402, and 1785, for the years 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996, respectively) in order to reflect the proportion of spousal assaults committed by males.

In contrast to the police data, aggregate statistics provided by the Domestic Violence Program at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) indicate that between 11 and 15 percent of women who used this service disclosed incidents of sexual abuse by their partners. This suggests that women were three to four times more likely to disclose a sexual assault by an intimate male partner to health care workers than to the police.

Table 6: Sexual Abuse Incidents disclosed to VGH

	1993	1994	1995	1996
# Domestic Violence Incidents	249	251	263	209
# Sexual Abuse Disclosures	28	37	37	33
Percent of Disclosures	11	15	14	15

Source: Domestic Violence Program, Vancouver General Hospital (1998).

²⁹ When the number sexual assaults within same-sex relationships are included in the totals, the figures increase slightly – 82, 44, 32, and 56 for the years 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996, respectively – but they still represent no more than five percent of domestic violence incidents reported to the police.

Both the empirical literature and anecdotal evidence on this issue suggest that women generally do not report being sexually assaulted by their partners (whether married or common-law)³⁰ to the police because: (a) they believe that the police cannot do anything about the assault; (b) they fear they will not be believed or that they will be blamed for their own victimization; and (c) they experience fear and shame in talking about the attack (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Suleman & McLarty, 1997). Estimates for the percentage of women who do not report being sexually assaulted range from 62 to 90 percent (Solicitor General, 1985, cited in Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993:29). Yet, given the opportunity to disclose these incidents to researchers conducting the national *Violence Against Women Survey*, 572,000 women reported being sexually assaulted, compared to the 15,200 sexual assaults that were reported to the police (Statistics Canada, 1994, cited in Johnson, 1996b:53). These findings suggest that while women may not be reporting assaults and sexual assaults to the police, they are reporting their experiences to front-line workers, health care professionals, and survey researchers who might be perceived as more sympathetic listeners than criminal justice professionals. The results of this study seem to confirm that women are still reluctant to report sexual assaults by their partners to the police. Yet it is not clear from the data provided by the Vancouver General Hospital whether women's disclosures of sexual abuse came about as the result of their own volition, or as a result of a policy mandate that requires health care professionals within the emergency department to systematically ask women patients about any experiences with domestic violence.

According to statistics from the Coroners' Service Division (1998), the number of female homicide victims in BC remained relatively stable between 1994 and 1996, with totals listed as 35, 39, and 37, respectively. Unfortunately, these statistics do not indicate how many of the victims were adult females within the City of Vancouver, nor how many of these women might have been killed by current or ex-partners. Data from the Vancouver Police Department also indicate that the number of spousal-related homicides remained relatively stable between 1993 and 1996 (2, 0, 3, and 3 for each of these years, respectively). However, as alluded to earlier in this paper, homicide statistics may also under-report the true number of deaths attributable to criminal homicide (i.e., first degree murder, second degree murder, and manslaughter) as a result of methodological problems or discretionary practices (Gartner, 1995). According to Gartner:

An unknown number of people who go missing or who perish in automobile crashes, house fires, or hospitals and nursing homes, are victims of criminal homicide, but their deaths are not reported in official statistics on homicide because bodies cannot be found or the mode of death is either incorrectly attributed or impossible to determine. (1995:189)

³⁰ Even though, according to the *Women's Safety Project*, "25 percent of all rapes reported by women [in 1993] were committed by their husbands" (1993, cited in Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993:25).

Unlike the stability reflected in the number of spousal killings that occurred in Vancouver between 1993 and 1996, the reported number of attempted murder victims in domestic violence cases dropped from six to three between 1993 and 1996. In the absence of more information about the homicide and attempted murder cases, it is difficult to speculate on the implications of these trends vis-à-vis the kinds of violence committed against some women in their relationships. Does this shift represent a decrease in the magnitude of violence against women, or does it merely reflect a shift in reporting and/or charging patterns in order to secure a conviction?

As noted previously, the police data seem to indicate that approximately 15 percent of relationship violence consistently takes the form of threatening and other intimidating behaviours (see Table 1). Likewise, there also appears to be a reasonably consistent proportion – approximately 15 percent – of criminal behaviour within relationships that takes the form of indirectly hurting and/or intimidating a victim through damaging or stealing her property. The police-reported data also show a steady increase in the number of criminal harassment cases between 1993 and 1996. Overall the data suggest that the nature of relationship violence in Vancouver is expressed not only as physically aggressive behaviour (e.g., in the form assaults and sexual assaults), but also as harassing, threatening or other intimidating activities that might or might not be interpreted as assaults.

SHIFTS IN REPORTING INCIDENTS TO THE POLICE

As a number of researchers have pointed out (cf., DeKeseredy & Ellis, 1995; Johnson, 1996a; Kong, 1997), one of the major difficulties in accurately recording the level of relationship violence is that it continues to be under-reported, perhaps in large part because these offences generally occur behind closed doors. Unlike male victims of violent crimes, “females are most likely to be assaulted, sexually assaulted, or murdered in their own homes, by someone they know – most often a spouse or ex-spouse” (Johnson, 1996a:18). Many battered women believe that it is somehow their fault for either provoking an attack or failing to avoid the attack (Hart, 1996:101), and might therefore be disinclined to report an incident to the police unless the situation is deteriorating, and/or they fear for their lives.³¹

Furthermore, it is not just criminal justice professionals who may subscribe to the ideology that what happens within a couple’s dwelling is private and removed from the sphere of public accountability. It would appear that much of the general public seem to hold the view that what “goes on behind closed doors” other than their own is none of their business, unless they are somehow being inconvenienced. A most poignant observation from a police officer who participated in the focus group for the current research was that reports about domestic violence incidents were more likely to be submitted by neighbours, particularly in Vancouver’s east side, if they were being disturbed by the noise and they wanted the noise stopped. On the west side of the city, where dwellings were further apart,

³¹ Observations from focus group participants representing the police and transition house workers. Also see Johnson’s discussion of help-seeking patterns in her book *Dangerous Domains* (1996b).

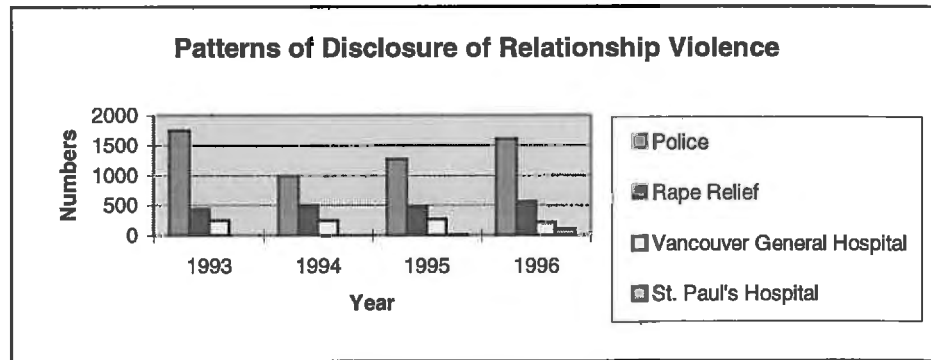
neighbours were not as likely to report incidents of domestic violence to the police. According to this particular police officer, all of the domestic violence files from the west side of the city were generated by the victims. Furthermore, in some cases the police had not even been contacted directly but had been dispatched by the 911 operator anyway because the dispatcher suspected an incident of wife assault had occurred, based on the details provided by the victim.

The smaller number of domestic violence calls from the west side may reflect class-based issues in addition to spatial factors, vis-à-vis the patterns of *reporting* domestic violence. If one accepts that a woman's exposure – and response – to relationship violence is “textured by her socio-economic position” (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993:19), then one would expect that women on the west side of Vancouver would have greater access to financial resources and a wider array of survival strategies for coping with violent relationships. However, it is often the case that women partnered to males in the high income brackets are at as much of a disadvantage as women from lower socio-economic backgrounds because the former group of women's access to financial resources is often severely curtailed by their spouses (cf., Steinem, 1994). As Steinem points out, “There are many ways in which class doesn't work for women ...” (1994:184). Violence against women in relationships does indeed cut across all income levels, even though help-seeking and reporting patterns may be quite different.

Although it is generally accepted that many abused women “suffer in silence,” (DeKeseredy & Ellis, 1995) a participant in the focus group believes that this is a myth. Women, particularly if they have sustained some kind of injury, are seeking help but not necessarily from the police. The remainder of this chapter will consider statistics from alternative sources of data in order to determine whether disclosures of violence are being made to organizations other than the police. Certainly, if there are no children directly involved in the violence, there is no compelling force (i.e., legislation) mandating that a woman who has been assaulted by her partner report it to the police. According to a social worker at St. Paul's Hospital (Interview Respondent #1), front-line workers are also under no obligation to report domestic violence either to the police or the Ministry for Children and Families, as long as the woman's children are not being abused by her partner.

A comparison of the number of disclosures of violence to the police with the number of disclosures to other organizations such as rape crisis centres and health professionals in emergency departments produces a surprising picture of the sources to which women disclose their experiences with wife assault: of the four organizations compared, it would appear that the Vancouver Police Department received the greatest number of complaints about all kinds of violence and intimidation against women in relationships. Vancouver Rape Relief received the second greatest number of calls pertaining to attacks by a male partner, followed by the Vancouver General Hospital's emergency department, and St. Paul's Hospital. It should be noted that the smaller number of disclosures to either of the hospitals is because the domestic violence programs at both hospitals were quite new during the early and middle years of the 1990s (see Figure 2). Further, the figures that are compared reference statistics from only one rape crisis centre. Cumulative statistics from a variety of different centres might suggest a substantial increase in the number of disclosures.

Figure 2: Patterns of Disclosure of Relationship Violence



Sources: Vancouver Police Department (1998); Vancouver Rape Relief (1998); Domestic Violence Program, VGH; Domestic Violence Program, St. Paul's Hospital.

While it is gratifying to see the number of incidents actually reported to the police, it should be noted that Figure 2 shows some fluctuations, with a slight downward trend, in the number of wife assaults reported to the Vancouver Police Department between 1993 and 1996. On the other hand, the proportion of calls to Vancouver Rape Relief regarding attacks by male partners gradually increased each year between 1993 and 1996. The data show a steady increase in the number of disclosures between 1993 and 1995, with a decrease in 1996. In the two years that St Paul's Hospital started its domestic violence program, the number of disclosures increased over six-fold, from 16 cases in 1995 to 108 cases in 1996.

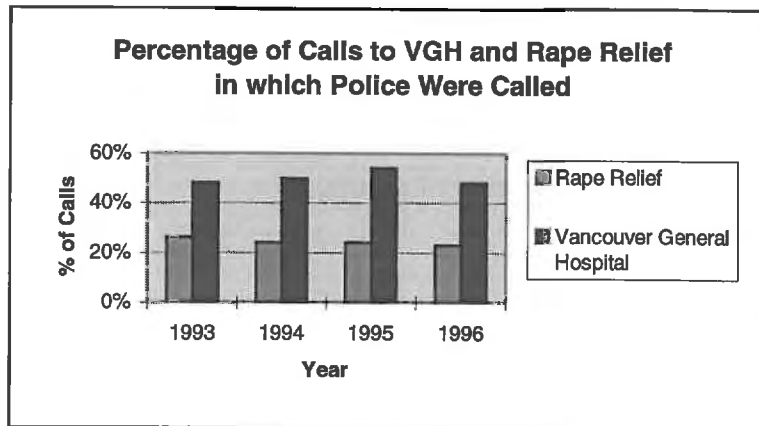
It is also advisable to keep in mind that not all of the reports to the police were generated by the victims. A footnote in a data report prepared by the Vancouver Police Department (Sabourin and Taylor, 1996:iii) indicates that unless otherwise indicated on a police report, it is assumed that the victim contacted the police. This suggests that the number of victim generated reports may be an over-estimation. Furthermore, some women contact other organizations for assistance or support in addition to involving the police. Other women may contact a women's centre or rape crisis centre in order to get some feedback or advice *prior* to reporting the violence to the police.³² It would be interesting to analyze how many of these cases are subsequently not reported to the police, perhaps as a result of contacting other organizations or learning about other women's negative experiences with the criminal justice system.

Of the women who were treated at Vancouver General Hospital for injuries pertaining to a wife assault, the police were involved in almost half of the cases,³³ and in some situations had taken the women to the hospital for treatment (see Figure 3).

³² Interview Respondent #2.

³³ According to Johnson, this may "reflect the interagency cooperation that exists between hospitals and police in many Canadian communities" (1996b:208).

Figure 3: Percentage of Calls to VGH and Rape Relief in which Police were Called



Sources: Vancouver Rape Relief (1998); Vancouver General Hospital, Domestic Violence Program (1998).

Figure 3 indicates that while there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of calls to Rape Relief in which the police had been called (from 26 to 23 percent) between 1993 and 1996, a different picture emerges for the statistics from the Domestic Violence Program at VGH. The percent of cases in which the police were involved varied from 48 to 54 percent. Of the cases at VGH in which the police had been involved, the abuser was arrested in 27 to 34 percent of the incidents that occurred between 1993 and 1996. More telling, however, are the data that indicate the frequency of non-arrests over the same time period (see Table 7).

Table 7: Frequency of Abuser being Arrested for the Incident

Arrested	1993	1994	1995	1996
Yes	68 (27%)	82 (32%)	89 (34%)	67 (31%)
No	146 (59%)	150 (60%)	163 (62%)	125 (60%)
Uncertain	35 (14%)	19 (8%)	11 (4%)	17 (8%)
Totals	249 (100)	251 (100)	263 (100)	209 (100)

Source: Vancouver General Hospital, Domestic Violence Program (1998).

In more than 50 percent of the cases each year, the abuser was not arrested for the incident. Since the data from VGH do not indicate the reasons for these outcomes, the numbers must be interpreted cautiously. At best, one can only speculate that perhaps the non-arrests occurred in situations where a woman referred herself to the hospital and did not wish to involve the police at that time. One would expect that arrests would have been made, in accordance with *VAWIR Policy* directives, in cases where the police had responded to the situation and brought the women to hospital for treatment. Additional data would be required in order to determine a relationship between the number of cases in which the police had been called and the frequency of arrests.

SUMMARY

This chapter critically analyzed the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (1997) figures on wife assault in terms of methodological, structural, and social factors that may all play a role in shaping the appearance of crime statistics. Definitions of “spouse” and “violence,” and in particular decisions concerning which offences are to be officially used as reflections of violence against women in relationships, influence the nature and extent of incidents that are captured in official statistics. Likewise, methodological rules applied to the data collected also shape statistics, as do any legislative changes or revisions in enforcement practices (i.e., structural factors). In turn, structural factors may influence victims’ and the general public’s patterns of reporting incidents to the police.

Based on the data presented in this section, one can conclude with some certainty that, as a result of the interactions of these factors, the number of wife assaults reported to the police do not accurately reflect the total number of incidents of male-to-female relationship violence. Given that the estimates of unreported violence range from 62 to 90 percent (especially for sexual assaults), it is advisable to exercise caution in interpreting the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics figures for wife assault as reflective of a downward trend in the extent of violence against women in relationships.

The next chapter of this report will further explore women’s help-seeking patterns and reasons for not reporting relationship violence to the police. This discussion will draw on front-line workers’ observations and perspectives.

CHAPTER IV: HELP-SEEKING PATTERNS

According to Johnson, of the 77 percent of wife assault victims who seek support in addressing the violence they are experiencing, only a quarter of these women report their violent partners to the police, a social service, or a physician (1996b:204). Drawing from the *Violence Against Women Survey* data (Statistics Canada, 1993), Johnson reports that most women tend to choose informal sources of help such as friends or family members over more formal resources – e.g., the criminal justice system – in response to their situations (1996b:204). Nonetheless, there is a “considerable proportion of violent events that victims [keep] to themselves” (Johnson, 1996b:205). Indeed, approximately one quarter (22 percent) of wife assault victims do not tell anybody about their experiences, even when they have suffered life threatening acts of violence at the hands of their partners (Johnson, 1996b:205).

In keeping with the results of the *Violence Against Women Survey* outlined above, the data collected for the present study also indicate that a gap exists between the number of wife assaults reported to the police and the extent of relationship violence that is actually occurring,³⁴ but if women are not contacting the police, to whom are they disclosing their experiences? Drawing from the qualitative data (anecdotal evidence) obtained through the focus group³⁵ and telephone interviews, this chapter addresses the following questions: What factors influence or impede the decision to report relationship violence to the police? Where are women turning to for help, if not the police? What help-seeking patterns have front-line workers observed? Are these patterns effective? The implications of the following discussion will be used as a basis to formulate several recommendations to facilitate effective responses to battered women’s requests for help (whether stated directly or indirectly).

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO REPORT VIOLENCE

Not surprisingly, several of the focus group participants indicated that many of their clients do not report violence to the police.³⁶ Many of the reasons cited in this study for not reporting violence – or not wanting to continue with criminal justice proceedings – have been well documented in the existing literature, including: fear of exacerbating the violence; financial concerns; fear of having their children taken away from them, either by

³⁴ According to Johnson, of the 26 percent of women who report violence to the police, 49 percent of the women only reported to the police after they had experienced ten or more battering episodes.

³⁵ For the purposes of this discussion, participants will be referred to as Speaker #1, Speaker #2, etc. A key indicating the participants’ organizations is provided in Appendix A of this report.

³⁶ However, there is no way of determining whether their clients’ decisions were influenced by the workers at these helping agencies or other people in whom the women might have confided their experiences.

their partner or by the state; fear of being disbelieved; and fear of losing their immigration status (cf., Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Hart, 1996; Jiwani & Buhagiar, 1997). An analysis of the focus group data highlights the presence of two pervasive themes – fear and distrust – that appear to form the basis of most of the reasons for not reporting violence to the police.

PERCEIVED FAILURE TO SERVE AND PROTECT

Based on the observations of front-line workers, many women choose not to disclose their experiences to the police because they do not trust the criminal justice system to offer them the kind of protection and assistance they need. Indeed, lack of faith in the criminal justice system's ability to adequately protect women from their violent partners appears to be a major impediment to encouraging women to report incidents of relationship violence. In some cases, this lack of trust has evolved out of personal experiences wherein previous efforts on the part of a woman to seek help (protection) from the criminal justice system proved to be unsuccessful:

I've had [clients] who have had ... [restraining] orders breached [The] guy [is] smashing their windows and they're not saying anything because they don't want to get kicked out of their co-op. And because the police didn't show up, [or] they showed up late ... he kept coming back. And so there is just a lack of belief that there's going to be any protection, so why create more fuss, why go back to the system when it didn't work the first time? (Speaker #1)

Other women have reached the same conclusions as a result of observing the experiences of friends in similar circumstances and reading about highly publicized cases such as the Vernon massacre.³⁷ According to Speaker #1, in the aftermath of the Vernon massacre many of the women she dealt with expressed a greater level of fear that they would not be protected by the criminal justice system. "They were seeing women ... who did try to do all the 'right' things – get away, and get orders, and have the police involved – even those women were getting killed" (Speaker #1). Speaker #1 concluded that "protection is limited, really, unless you have someone standing guard at your home and – even that's not going to work if someone [a violent ex-partner] is ... wanting to kill you." In the wake of the Gakhal and Velisek tragedies, it is hardly surprising that women may have concluded it was unrealistic to expect much protection from the criminal justice system.

When asked why many women who get into transition houses do not report their experiences to the police, another focus group participant (Speaker #4) offered the following observation:

³⁷ See Note 6 in this report for more details about this case. The Gakhal and Velisek cases are often cited as evidence that the police do not effectively respond to women's concerns or fears about violent partners.

... they don't know or trust the system. They're scared about the whole system and they're scared about what he will do if [she reports him to the police] – he may try to get the kids, a lot of times he does.... They're scared of engaging with the process/system, scared of not being believed. All the messages of the batterer are so strong at that time when she's in the transition house: "If you leave me I will ... kill you, kill the kids, get the kids, you'll never see the kids" So she's being kind of deprogrammed while she's in there, but those messages are really strong right at crisis time.

Speaker #4 also pointed out that women who have managed to escape the violence and get into a transition house are simply too overwhelmed with the implications of having to reorganize their lives to think about taking on anymore: "There's so much to do ... thinking about engaging the whole legal system is quite overwhelming."

DISTRUST OF SYSTEMS AND GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Quite apart from a lack of faith in the ability of the criminal justice system to protect women, there are also many women who are quite simply suspicious of the criminal justice system and/or any government-funded organizations. According to Interview Respondent #2, a front-line worker in a rape crisis centre, certain groups of women are particularly wary of any kind of encounter with the criminal justice system. Both, Interview Respondent #2 and Speaker #4 remarked that Aboriginal women seem to have an especially strong antipathy toward engaging the criminal justice system in their efforts to end relationship violence; however, this is hardly surprising in light of the historical context of their treatment by government agencies and the criminal justice system. According to Speaker #4, Aboriginal women are very reluctant to become involved in non-First Nations resources and systems for several reasons: first, they feel like they are betraying their people; second, "that's the system that's got 80 percent of jails filled with First Nations people"; and third, given the extensive racism First Nations women experience in all kinds of organizations, they're not very trusting of the system. It would appear that although Aboriginal women do use transition houses, they tend to be more inclined to use transition houses in which there is as much autonomy from government systems and funding as possible (Interview Respondent #2).

This deep suspicion and distrust of systems is, according to Interview Respondent #2, also shared by many new immigrants and refugees. Indeed, new immigrants and refugees are informed up-front that not only is wife assault not okay in Canada, but that the state has the power to apprehend one's children if there are grounds to believe that the children are being harmed or neglected (Speaker #1). Perhaps in order to avoid coming to the attention of "the state" and its powers of intervention, many new immigrants try to solve their own problems within a close-knit community. Speaker #1 pointed out that the disadvantage of this approach is that an abused woman may end up feeling more isolated and with fewer resources available to her.

According to Interview Respondent #2, the more vulnerable a particular group of women feels, the less likely they are to trust the criminal justice system or government funded services. According to Interview Respondent #2, some of these groups of women (e.g., aboriginal women, lesbians, visible minority women, and some immigrant and refugee women) are beginning to develop and create their own support and referral systems, based on word-of-mouth. Furthermore, Interview Respondent #2 remarked that social class also has some bearing on the willingness to report violence to the police. Middle-class women who are immigrants or visible minority women are more inclined to engage with mainstream service organizations and/or report wife assault to the police than are their working-class counterparts.

MAINTAINING SILENCE TO PREVENT POTENTIAL LOSSES

Women's fears of having their children taken away from them if they report their partners' violence was a recurring theme throughout the focus group discussion. Speaker #2 (a counsellor) commented that often in situations where a separated couple is engaged in a custody and access battle, the woman is reluctant "to involve the police in case it looks like she's being revengeful, or that she's making this thing up or whatever, or she just fears that [it] will aggravate the problem. Also I've seen lots of fear ... him threatening to have the kids taken away" Speaker #4 maintained that custody and access issues are a major deterrent to women reporting violence to the police, particularly as women are now being granted sole custody of the children less often than in the past. This situation is partly due to cut-backs in the availability of legal aid, which is often the only form of legal counsel that some women are able to afford. Furthermore, many abused women are so used to "keeping the peace," that they will escape from a violent relationship and not make any demands in terms of child support or access to shared financial assets, rather than risk escalating the tensions by making legal demands regarding custody and maintenance issues in court (Speaker #4).

According to Speaker #4, women are also fearful of having the state take away their children if family violence is reported to the police. Speaker #4 explained that as a result of learning about the long-term impact on children who witness violence, many social workers are now insisting that either the women and their children go to a transition house, or the children will be apprehended by the Ministry for Children and Families. This trend has given rise to a situation in which some women are essentially being coerced into getting counselling for themselves and their children and/or going to transition houses whether or not they want to be there. As Speaker #4 pointed out, "it is difficult enough being in a transition house voluntarily, it is certainly more difficult if women feel that they have been ordered to go there against their wills."

Women who are new immigrants and dependent on their partners for sponsorship are even more fearful of the possible consequences of reporting violence because they risk losing their children *and* their immigration status. Speaker #1 explained that:

... immigration is a priority to stay here. So, especially if they're on visitors' visas, or same thing if they've been promised sponsorship ... there's usually less likelihood that they're going to go forward because either it could mean that they're not going to be able to bring in their family if they don't maintain this relationship, or if sponsorship is pending, they won't have a way ... they'll have to go back to their country, more than likely. If children are involved and there's an issue of immigration, and if the partner wanted to take the children away or wanted the woman to be sent away, but wanted to have access to and custody of the children, [that's also a concern]....

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

Unlike stranger assaults, violence within intimate relationships is shaped by complex interpersonal dynamics that make the situation "more complex than just person A hitting person B" (Speaker #1). As Speaker #1 pointed out, originally the two people involved cared about each other, and "the overriding thing is a lot of these women really love these guys." This observation was further supported by the comments of Speaker #2 who observed that many women – particularly when they were not the individuals who contacted the police – appear to be more concerned about how their partners are faring subsequent to being arrested, than they are about their own issues. More specifically, "there's a big concern about what the process is doing to him and how awful it must be for him" (Speaker #2). Speaker #2 concluded that, "In the end, a lot of women mostly just want the violence to end They want him to go to counselling, but they don't want to have him go to jail, so they don't want to involve the police. They'd like a counsellor to come in and deal with him."

Consequently, a lot of women who give statements at the time of the incident often wish by the next morning that they had not done so, and they will often phone either the police or the victim services counsellor to ask if the statement can be changed or recanted (Speaker #2). Sometimes the victim's change of heart is a result of having her partner threaten her with further violence if she does not drop the matter (Speaker #3); therefore, Crown counsel are reluctant to even alter no-contact orders without personally interviewing a woman, let alone drop the charges. Many women consequently discover that, like all large machines, once the criminal justice system is set in motion it is even more difficult to stop the process than to get it moving in the first place – particularly in light of the fact that both the police and the Crown are supposed to be following mandatory arrest and no-drop policies, respectively, in domestic violence cases

WHEN ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

As the police data clearly indicate, at least some of the total number of incidents of domestic violence are reported to the police, either by the victim, a neighbour, or a witness (including the woman's children). In light of the feelings of fear and/or distrust that some women may feel toward involving the criminal justice system in their struggle to end the

violence in their relationships, what factor(s) would prompt women to call the police for help? According to several of the focus group participants, women are more likely to report relationship violence if the risk of lethality is increasing rapidly, and they fear that their partners really might kill them (Speaker #1; Speaker #4). In the course of her work with immigrant and refugee women, Speaker #1 has observed that most of these women will not report their partners unless the abuse has been highly physical from the outset: "I think for the ones [where] it's been highly physical throughout, there's a stronger want for the police to be [involved] because they're actually afraid for their lives." A woman may also be more inclined to report the violence to the police when her partner threatens violence against her family; she "is freaked out more about her parents, or her sister or her brother or something, and she wants to put a stop to that..." (Speaker #1). Speaker #1's observations on the tendency to report actions that are perceived as threats or harassment may offer some explanation for the police data that consistently reflect a tendency to report this type of relationship violence.

Speaker #4 maintained that generally women do not "... seek any kind of help until things get really bad," and then they will call the police to protect them from their violent partners. Adding to this observation, Speaker #1 also suggested that for many women, phoning the police is a last resort after all other efforts to put a stop to a partner's or ex-partner's intimidating/violent behaviours have failed. Speaker #1 summarized these situations as follows:

A lot of women just want it to stop. What I hear is "if he just stopped and left me alone ... just don't call me, don't phone me" If the man just stopped doing it, I don't think they [the women] would go to the police if there was some way of intervening in that, to stop it from happening. It's just that they're so tired of it happening ... or it's escalated so that every time they try to take steps to move away it just gets worse or the control gets more severe

According to Speaker #3 (a detective in the Domestic Violence Response Unit of the Vancouver Police Department), in cases where a woman has phoned the police, "it's almost always during an episode, during a fight, and almost always at a real pinnacle. When you talk to her about the history of it, it's at a pinnacle in the escalations of it [the violence]." This observation essentially echoes those of other front-line workers who provide services for victims of wife assault. These observations are in keeping with data provided by the Vancouver Police Department. Specifically, a report for the month of January 1995 indicates that previous abuse by the suspect was reported in almost 62 percent of the domestic violence cases attended that month (Sabourin and Taylor, 1996:iii). The same report also advises that percentages indicating previous abuse may be conservative, since "in many cases, the victim may be apprehensive or embarrassed to tell the officer that this abuse has occurred before" (Sabourin and Taylor, 1996:iii).

This pattern of not seeking help from the police until women are at a crisis point also has significant implications for the interpretation of official crime statistics on wife assault. Clearly a large number of assaults and other criminal behaviours engaged in for the

purpose of intimidating an intimate female partner are not being reported to the police. Yet, if women are waiting until the risk of lethality is imminent, one would expect to see greater numbers of more serious offences being reported by the police to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, given that the magnitude of the injuries sustained in such episodes would likely be greater than those associated with Level 1 assaults.³⁸ This observation prompts one to question whether women seek help or disclose their situations to anyone at all before reaching a crisis stage in their relationships.

PATTERNS OF DISCLOSURE

According to Speaker #4, there is a widespread myth that abused women don't seek help, that they "suffer in silence." However it was the opinion of the focus group participants, based on their observations, that women do tell somebody. Many of them talk to friends, families, or acquaintances within a spiritual community (Speaker #4). Other women will disclose their situations to a professional – a doctor, a teacher, a service provider, in some instances a financial aid worker – whom they feel they can trust. In some situations, women will even mention the abuse to a virtual stranger. For example, Speaker #1 recited an anecdote in which she had received a call from Revenue Canada: apparently an abused woman was filling out her tax return and disclosed the abuse to the Revenue Canada employee,³⁹ who in turn reported the incident to Speaker #1. In yet other situations, it is a child who will disclose family violence to a teacher or school counsellor (Speaker #1).

According to both Speaker #1 and Speaker #4, the timing and extent of a disclosure of violence generally depends on "when and where [women] are in their crises" (Speaker #1). It would appear that initially a lot of women employ a "strategy" of testing the waters to get a sense of whether they will be believed prior to making a full disclosure of the violence they are experiencing. Speaker #4 described it as being "a little bit on kind of a fishing trip with seeing if they [other people] can handle what she has to say...." Much depends on both the listener's attentiveness and ability to pick up on the unspoken message or request for help. As one participant (Speaker #5) noted, "It's so easy to miss. They come to ... you and unless you ask questions I'm only beginning to tune in" Other times a woman might approach a professional and ask general questions pertaining to domestic violence, but the professional will not realize until later that the woman was gathering information for herself, or disclosing her own situation. Speaker #3 illustrated this point in the following anecdote:

³⁸ Wife assault injuries documented by the Domestic Violence Program at Vancouver General Hospital range from pushing and slapping, to dragging, choking and burning. It should be noted that women who sustain very severe injuries (e.g., have been beaten into unconsciousness) are taken straight to intensive care and therefore are not always picked up in the routine screening done as part of the intake in the emergency department (Interview Respondent #1).

³⁹ Speaker #1 did not indicate whether this disclosure was made to Revenue Canada verbally or in writing.

After one talk, we had a woman coming up and asking about safety plans, and what should [she] tell them At the end of the day, when I was driving home I realized it was not about anyone else – it was about her! She was asking “What should I say, what should I pack,” so I’m giving her this whole I’d tuned out and missed it.

Another strategy employed by women, particularly if they have either just passed a crisis stage, or are aware of escalating tensions, is to check out the available resources by asking questions. For many women, the process of researching available options and resources may seem formidable. After all, how would a woman who has never before found herself in an abusive situation even know where to start looking for information? As Speaker #3 pointed out, “There are very few all-encompassing 1-800 numbers or [local] numbers where you can call and get a resource list of [what you need].” Women’s centres, crisis lines, and community-based information and referral services will offer an extensive list of resources and suggestions for women seeking help, but, again, the woman must first have some knowledge that such resource centres exist and are accessible. Several participants commented on the difficulties women face in just trying to find and connect with the appropriate resources. The difficulties are greatly magnified for women who come from a very different social or cultural context, or who are not English speaking, white, middle-class, and educated (Speaker #1).

Speaker #3 observed that even within the police department, they often have to “phone around and phone around before they actually get somewhere.” One can easily imagine how frustrating the process must be for a woman who is not used to dealing with community agencies or systems to have to contact so many different people, re-tell all or part of her story, and possibly have to deal with negative or inadequate responses from the people she is turning to for help. It would appear that women have to be incredibly strong, resilient and resolved to get the help they need because “no one is making it easy for them” (Speaker #1). This point is clearly illustrated in the following comments:

Women have to work: if they want to get help, they have to work to get it. And if they want to be protected, they have to work hard, so they have to be particularly strong and resilient to follow-up.... One woman came to me with a whole set of files for each thing she was doing, and she had all this stuff she had to keep on the go.... You have to be really together. If you are going to get beaten up, you have to be really together about the paperwork and about knowing that. And if that’s not your strong point then ... it’s going to be really hard. (Speaker #1)

I was going to say that women have to be more than strong – it’s resolved. They have to be so resolved that they want this thing to get out that they just have to keep knocking on ... doors. So many women knock on so many doors to get help before they get somewhere. (Speaker #3)

According to Speaker #4, seeking help from transition houses is generally a last resort effort after all other options have been exhausted: A lot of the women in transition houses “are there because the fear is really high. The risk of lethality is really high and it’s a last resort. They’ve been isolated and have very few other resources.” Speculating on why this is the case, Speaker #4 pointed out that being in a transition house still has a stigma attached to it, and that, furthermore, transition houses are not exactly “Club Med.”

In many cases, women seek help from their family physicians (Speaker #4) or other health professionals they may encounter. If a woman presents at the emergency ward of a hospital that has an effective domestic violence protocol in place, she may find a supportive environment in which to disclose the abuse, even if she does not want to do anything about her situation at the time (Interview Respondent #1). Both Vancouver General⁴⁰ and St. Paul’s Hospitals have developed and implemented domestic violence programs within their emergency departments. Their domestic violence protocols include screening for relationship violence as a routine question to be asked of all female patients attending the emergency department for treatment, as reflected in the statistics provided to me by these organizations and analyzed in the previous chapter.

Clearly, women engage in a variety of help-seeking patterns, depending on the resources including time and personal space, available to them. Women may choose to pursue these help-seeking patterns either in addition to, or in place of contacting the police, and with greater or lesser degrees of effectiveness. The ensuing analysis considers the effectiveness of many of these help-seeking behaviours and their impacts on battered women.

EFFECTIVENESS OF HELP-SEEKING PATTERNS

Presumably, women who disclose incidents of violence to someone they know or trust do so with the aim of somehow stopping their partners’ violence from continuing and/or escalating. When asked to comment on the help-seeking patterns identified earlier, the focus group participants generally concurred that most of the behaviours identified are not particularly helpful – at least not in terms of reducing the likelihood of future violence. In particular, several of the focus group members expressed concern about some health practitioners’ responses – or lack thereof – to disclosures of wife assault. Focus group participants also expressed concerns about both the nature and quality of responses that women might encounter in response to their disclosures of abuse, and the fact that many women’s efforts to seek information proved to be entirely predicated on the good will of the individuals contacted.

⁴⁰ Refer to Grunfeld, Hotch, and MacKay’s (1995) report, *Identification, Assessment, Care Referral and Follow-up of Women Experiencing Domestic Violence Who Come to the Emergency Department for Treatment: Final Report*.

DISCLOSING VIOLENCE IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS

According to Speakers #1 and #4, women will most often present at their physicians' offices with complaints of depression, or problems sleeping, but they do not necessarily indicate why they are experiencing stress-related health concerns. Doctors may fail to ask the appropriate questions or raise the issue of violence, if they are not particularly well informed about these issues. In other situations, even where it is quite obvious that a female patient's injuries have been inflicted by someone else, the physician still may not say anything to the woman. In relating the following anecdote, Speaker #3 expressed some major concerns over his perceptions of some health professionals' responses to disclosures of domestic abuse:

"I've got one [case] where she was [assaulted] on two occasions in over a week. Once she was spanked to the point where the guy couldn't hit her anymore She went to the doctor the next day because of the welts; she couldn't sit down. And does the doctor do anything? He does nothing. I'm going to follow up on ... it because I know the medical association ... put out a letter to doctors about a year and a half ago, reminding them of their responsibility to at least educate the woman about reporting

Speaker #4 indicated that many doctors are reluctant to get involved in "anything that results in them having to appear in court." It appeared to be the unanimous opinion of all the participants that many doctors in private practice could do more to educate and support their patients by naming the abuse and telling their female patients that there are options for them – that they don't have to accept this kind of behaviour from their partners. At the very least, physicians in private practice could provide patients with information and lists of referrals – pamphlets from local women's organizations and services could be displayed in waiting areas or in the washrooms.

In situations where a woman and her spouse (and possibly her extended family) have the same physician, she may not feel safe disclosing the abuse because she is not aware of, or does not understand, the confidential nature of a doctor-patient relationship. If the woman does not speak English and is accompanied by her partner or other family member to act as a translator, it is far less likely that she will disclose the abuse to her doctor. Furthermore, where entire families are being treated by the same physician, the doctor may be disinclined to want to get in the middle of "family problems" (Speaker #1).

Yet, some individuals maintain that disclosing abuse to a health professional actually is an effective help-seeking pattern. According to Interview Respondent #1, some women will choose to disclose the abuse to their doctors precisely because of the confidentiality inherent in doctor-patient relationships. This, of course, assumes not only that the physician is sensitive to the dynamics of intimate violence, but also that the woman has a good relationship with her physician, is not confronted with language and cultural barriers, and is actually able to consult with the doctor in private.

Many assaultive partners are very controlling and will insist on accompanying their partners into a doctor's consultation room, thus blocking any opportunities for the woman to disclose the violence to the doctor or nurse (Speaker #5). In recognition of this concern, St. Paul's Hospital now places information about relationship violence in the women's washrooms. In order to provide women with an opportunity to access this information, medical staff will ask the woman to go to the washroom, ostensibly for the purpose of providing routine samples (Speaker #5).

HAPHAZARD RESPONSES AND MISINFORMATION

As indicated earlier in this chapter, women often have to be extremely persistent in their efforts to seek help in dealing with – or ending – abusive relationships. Speaker #1 described the effectiveness of this pattern of seeking help from whatever sources are available as being haphazard at best:

Really [they're] going on the kindness and hopes that this one individual in some system will be nice, and that's really how it is. Women have these patterns of gaining help from whatever source, and if [they're] lucky they will go to that financial aid worker who has some caring or some openness to track someone else down, but it's very haphazard ...

Speaker #1 concluded that sometimes this approach works very well – if women are fortunate enough to contact someone who is knowledgeable. On other occasions, by the time clients meet up with her, they have accumulated a whole list of information and misinformation, as well as possibly being subjected to the victim-blaming attitudes of whomever the women disclosed their experiences to. Drawing from her work experiences, Speaker #1 remarked that:

... by the time they [immigrant women] come to me, they don't really want to talk about the abuse; they're there specifically about custody/access issues or divorce/separation. [When] I talk to them about it, they have this whole list of information, and a lot of it is misinformation, right down to reporting that the husband can have a say whether this information gets processed or not processed, and whether they can have a divorce – the husband has a say whether they can or can't. And so, you know, to get out of it, they're not going to press charges, so some of it is very bad information.

Because women may disclose their situations to an individual such as a teacher or some other service provider who may not be fully apprised of the dynamics of intimate violence and how to make an effective intervention, women may inadvertently be given misinformation or inappropriate referrals. Speaker #1 noted that on many occasions she would have financial-aid workers, ESL instructors, or other types of service providers wanting to “do something for this poor woman,” but none of them had taken time to address these concerns with the woman in question and determine what she wanted to do about the situation.

Speaker #4 expressed real concern about making interventions without understanding the context of a woman's life. She explained that anyone making an intervention really needs to have a careful, thoughtful understanding of the situation or they can do more harm than good: "If you don't know the dynamics and don't understand that this can be life or death ... if you don't understand the whole scene, just giving out advice [doesn't help]." Speaker #4 was of the opinion that professionals in a variety of settings need much more training about violence against women "so that when a woman comes in they can hear her and ask the right questions."

It would appear that the concerns outlined in the previous discussion seem to support Interview Respondent #2's position that the most effective strategy for getting help is to contact women's organizations – women's resource and counselling centres, crisis centres, and transition houses. Although women's services are certainly better equipped to provide appropriate interventions and support, there may be limitations in terms of their accessibility for some groups of women.⁴¹ For example some women who have English as a second language – or speak very little English at all – may feel more isolated in a transition house than they do in their own communities, particularly if there is nobody present who can communicate with them in their own language or offer them on-going verbal support while they are staying at the transition house.

SUMMARY

Much of the focus group's discussion centred on the barriers that prevent or discourage women from reporting intimate violence – primarily to the police, but also to other organizations – and the impediments that limit effective help-seeking patterns. Based on the discussion throughout this chapter, it might be reasonable to assume that domestic violence incidents are also under-reported to other agencies, given the difficulties that many women face in their efforts to seek help.

The qualitative data in this chapter also suggest that some improvements could be made that would not only make it easier for women to get help if they choose to disclose their situations, but may also facilitate an increase in reporting domestic violence. For example, the appearance of coordinating committees to end violence against women have been effective in bringing together anti-violence organizations with criminal justice agencies in an effort to develop protocols and facilitate coordinated responses to intimate violence. Furthermore, according to Speaker #3, developing liaisons between the police and transition houses and other services for battered women has helped to develop a level of trust and cooperation between the two systems, which in turn has facilitated the process of encouraging women to report domestic violence to the police. Improving accessibility and availability of services to women from a wide range of ethnocultural backgrounds is also a critical step in facilitating the disclosure of wife assault to appropriate resources.

⁴¹ A major impediment for many immigrant and refugee women trying to seek help is the lack of access to services in their own languages.

Specifically, improving access to services by making information available in several languages and providing subsidized daycare for the children of women attending ESL classes helps to break down the barriers that keep many women isolated within their communities and abusive relationships.

The following chapter will consider how these observations might be used to form the bases of feasible recommendations both for facilitating disclosures of relationship violence and ensuring organizations across a variety of systems respond appropriately and effectively to disclosures of wife assault. In addition, the next chapter will discuss the conclusions that may reasonably be drawn from this study, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Using the statistics provided by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics as a starting point, this study has critically analyzed the figures to determine what factors may account for the decrease in the number of wife assaults reported to the Vancouver Police Department between 1993 and 1996. Through examining the sociological and methodological factors that have an impact on crime statistics, this study has shown that there is some evidence to suggest that the decreases are likely due to shifts in reporting violence to the police, changes in legislation and policies, and methodological considerations rather than a real decrease in the level of wife assault.

Of particular interest is the impact of introducing criminal legislation – such as the criminal harassment legislation in 1993 and *Bill C-46* in 1996 – on the number of wife assaults reflected in the crime statistics. Regarding the criminal harassment provisions in the *Criminal Code*, an analysis of the relationship between the increasing number of criminal harassment charges and the decreasing number of assaults over the same time period (1993 to 1996) deserves further consideration. It is also possible that in light of criminal court cases that have challenged the constitutionality of the *Criminal Code* sections governing access to complainants' records, victims of spousal sexual assault may be reluctant to report these incidents if they believe that the defendant may have access to purportedly confidential medical and counselling records.

An examination of the qualitative data indicates that while many women are not reporting violence to the police, they are disclosing their experiences to front-line workers in, for instance, rape crisis centres, domestic violence programs in hospitals, and other areas. Interestingly, public talks on the topic of relationship violence often tend to facilitate disclosures after the presentations. An analysis of both help-seeking patterns and aggregate data provided by various service providers indicates that women may disclose their experiences to friends and service providers in community agencies – both in women's organizations and other organizations – and medical settings. A recurring theme was the hard work undertaken by many women in order to find someone who will: (a) believe and support their disclosures; and (b) make an appropriate intervention for these women. These difficulties are, of course, magnified several times over for women facing additional barriers such as language, abilities, or addictions. Several participants in the focus group expressed concerns about both the haphazard responses of some service providers, and the lack of action – in the form of offering support and education – some physicians displayed in response to their patient's disclosures of abuse. On the other hand, at least two of the large hospitals in the city of Vancouver have implemented domestic violence programs in an effort to provide effective treatment and services to women admitted to the emergency department for injuries.

In keeping with the published empirical studies in this area, the qualitative data in this study offer some support for the arguments that a lack of faith in the criminal justice system, negative experiences with the police, and fear prevent many women from reporting spousal assaults and other types of intimidating/violent behaviour to the police. Widely publicized cases such as the tragic massacre of the Gakhal family and the shooting of Sharon Velisek gave many women a very clear message that they could not depend on the criminal justice system to protect them from violent spouses, despite the existence of a mandatory arrest and no-drop policy. Other women who have been subjected to systemic racism or other forms of discrimination may choose not to engage with the criminal justice system or other bureaucracies, and instead seek help on their own or through word-of-mouth in their own communities. Many women do not report their partners to the police because they fear they will lose their children and, in some cases their immigration or refugee status. A more extensive analysis of data collected from front-line organizations in order to compare the number of women who are reporting violence to other sources (e.g., doctors, hospitals, counsellors, educators), with those who report to the police and other sources of help would also provide some interesting and practical insights. Of particular interest would be a study that focuses on whether women who disclose their experiences both to alternative sources and the police, approach these organizations before or after they have talked to the police.

Most of the quantitative data used in this study exhibited a puzzling pattern in which numbers decreased from 1993 to 1994 and started increasing again in 1996. A study that sought to correlate these trends with other socio-economic indicators may prove to be useful in identifying additional factors that may influence either the actual levels of male-to-female intimate violence (and the nature of the violent actions), and/or reporting patterns of wife assault victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations and suggestions for improving systems' and agencies' responses to disclosures of wife assault emerged out of the qualitative data. First, professionals in both the medical and human services field (including criminal justice agencies) need much more extensive training in the area of violence against women to better prepare them to respond to disclosures by their clients. Many service providers still do not fully understand the dynamics of violent relationships, and consequently they may offer well-meaning but inappropriate advice because they do not understand that it is not that easy for a woman in an abusive relationship to "just leave him."

Second, based on some of the comments made by Speaker #1, service providers also need to consult with a woman about her situation and what she wants to do before going into "help" mode and possibly offering inappropriate referrals or advice, or legal interventions. In particular, interventions need to be made in a manner that do not cast blame on the woman and are sensitive to her fears of possibly losing her children (either to her partner or to the state), or her immigration status.

Third, there is a real need to somehow streamline and simplify the system for women who do want to report their abusive partners.

Fourth, many organizations need to make their services much more accessible and sensitive to women from a variety of backgrounds. This can be achieved through having resource material available in a variety of languages in locations that are likely to be frequented by various populations of women. Services must also be available in several languages, or at the very least, arrangements could be made for an on-call interpreter.

Fifth, since educational presentations seem to be a good way of facilitating disclosures of violence, perhaps an emphasis on developing a series of discussions in accessible locations for women of various cultural backgrounds may provide both another option for facilitating a recognition and naming of their experiences as abuse and a means of getting help. Furthermore, having the police involved in such activities would help to reinforce the idea that domestic violence is taken seriously as both a pressing social concern and criminal justice issue.

Overall, the study shows that we must interpret the apparent decrease in the number of wife assaults very carefully. It cannot automatically be assumed that this decrease in the number of wife assaults is a result of a less violent society, or that perhaps violent men really are being deterred through the implementation of mandatory arrest policies – assuming that such policies are consistently applied in every situation. Rather, we must look to the social contexts in which domestic violence and criminal justice responses to this issue are played out, and we must also consider the methodological practices that shape any set of statistics.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

1. Interview Respondents and Focus Group Participants (by Organization)

- Speaker #1: Immigrant Services Society
- Speaker #2: Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- Speaker #3: Domestic Violence/Criminal Harassment Unit, Vancouver Police Department
- Speaker #4: BC & Yukon Association of Transition Houses
- Speaker #5: The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women & Children
- Interview Respondent #1: Domestic Violence Program, St. Paul's Hospital
- Interview Respondent #2: Vancouver Rape Relief

2. Organizations that Provided Statistics

- BC Ministry of Attorney General BC, Police Services Division
- BC Ministry of Attorney General, Coroners' Service Division
- Vancouver Rape Relief
- St. Paul's Hospital, Social Work Department
- Vancouver General Hospital
- Vancouver Police Department

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you keep statistics on the numbers of clients who reported their partners' assaultive behaviours to the police?
2. Would it be possible to have access to aggregate statistics for the years 1993-1996?
3. Do you know of women who have not reported incidents of domestic violence to the police?
4. What reasons did these women give for not reporting incidents of intimate violence to the police?
5. Why do you suppose women may choose not to report partner assaults?
6. Where do you think women might be turning for help if they are not contacting the police? (To whom else might these women be disclosing their experiences?)
7. What help-seeking patterns have you observed?
8. From your observation, are these effective behaviours? (i.e., do they help to increase the women's personal safety, or reduce the risk of repeated assaults?)
9. Have you noticed (or are you aware of) differences in: patterns of help-seeking behaviours; disclosure of partner assaults to the police (or other sources such as doctors, family members, friends, service agencies), for the following groups?:

Aboriginal women
Lesbians
Women with disabilities
Immigrant women
Women of colour
Refugee women.

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