

MYTH	REALITY
1. Myth: <i>Family Violence and Abuse is rare in Canada - it's not really a serious issue facing my community.</i>	Reality: At least 1 in 2 Canadian women have experienced physical or sexualized violence in their lifetime. ¹ This does not even factor in all of the other kinds of abuse that many women experience: emotional, verbal, psychological, financial, social, technological, stalking, harassment and/or cultural/spiritual abuse. If we factor in all types of abuse, these rates would soar much higher. In addition, approximately 61 women are killed every year in Canada by their partner or ex partner, reinforcing just how serious family violence is in our community ² .
2. Myth: <i>Only certain kinds of people become victims of family violence and abuse. It doesn't happen to just anyone.</i>	Reality: Victims come from all walks of life, all cultures, all educational backgrounds, all income levels, all faiths, etc. It can happen to anyone. While abuse can happen to anyone, certain marginalized groups do experience higher rates of violence and abuse ³ . In our experience working with perpetrators of abuse, this is because perpetrators are more likely to seek out people who have vulnerabilities in order to try to have power and control over someone else and not because victims are doing anything wrong.
3. Myth: <i>Only certain kinds of people become perpetrators of violence and abuse.</i>	Reality: Perpetrators come from all walks of life, all cultures, all educational backgrounds, all income levels, etc. People often think it is easy to identify someone who acts abusively. There are many preconceived notions that the perpetrator will look and act in certain ways, or that he comes from a certain country or religion. Because people often think they can recognize a perpetrator, they may express disbelief to victims who disclose the abuse, and this reaction can be quite hurtful to victims. Men who behave abusively may also behave in kind, loving ways. They often do not behave abusively in front of others; you may not see them as perpetrators of violence and abuse.
4. Myth: <i>Victims of family violence and abuse are sometimes responsible for causing or provoking violence because they nag too much or "push their partner's buttons"</i>	Reality: Nobody deserves to be abused and nobody "asks" for it. Victims of abuse do not want to be hurt or treated this way, and they are not responsible for causing or provoking the abuse. If a perpetrator is feeling frustrated, impatient, or angry with their partner, they have many healthy, safe and respectful choices about how they will respond, none of which include being violent and abusive. The perpetrator is responsible for his behaviour.
5. Myth: <i>Men are victims of family violence and abuse just as often as women are. Women are abusive as often as men are.</i>	Reality: While family violence and abuse can and does happen to both women and men, by women and men, it does not happen at equal rates or in the same way. In Canada 86% of victims of family violence and abuse are female and 92% of perpetrators are male. This does not happen in equal rates to women and men. Research also shows that the severity of injuries is worse for female victims than male victims, as is the lethality rate. Male victims do not stay with the perpetrator as long as female victims do, because they do not face the same or as many obstacles as female victims who wish to leave the perpetrator. ⁴
6. Myth: <i>Physical abuse is the most serious kind of abuses; other forms of abuse aren't as harmful.</i>	Reality: All types of abuse are harmful and unacceptable. While certain types of abuse are dealt with differently by the law (i.e. physical abuse is a crime while most forms of verbal abuse are not), it is not helpful to the victim to place abuse in a hierarchy or think of one kind of abuse as worse than another. Only the victim can say what has been the hardest thing for them to cope with.
7. Myth: <i>Family violence and abuse doesn't affect me or my family so it is really none of my business.</i>	Reality: Family violence impacts the entire community. More than 74% of Albertans report knowing someone who has experienced abuse ⁵ . These victims are our family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbours. They may be our bus driver, our doctor, or our children's teacher. Often, victims may not disclose the abuse they are experiencing because they fear they will be blamed or judged for what has happened to them. But this does not mean that abuse doesn't happen. In fact, whether you know someone who has experienced abuse or not, family violence impacts you. The issue of family violence and abuse costs tax payers \$7.4 billion annually ⁶ and many police, judicial and health care resources are used in responding to family violence.
8. Myth: <i>Family violence and abuse is caused by alcohol or drugs, mental health problems, and/or stress.</i>	Reality: There is no scientific research that identifies a specific cause for family violence and abuse. Many people have held mistaken beliefs that certain things will cause abuse; however, none of those have been proven. For example, many people use drugs and alcohol and never harm anyone else. Substances like drugs and alcohol can make a bad situation worse, but they do not cause the perpetrator to abuse.

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9. Myth: <i>Family violence is mostly a learned behaviour. Boys who grow up with abuse will become perpetrators and girls who grow up with abuse will become victims.</i>	Reality: Many children who grow up with family violence and abuse do not grow up to be perpetrators or victims. In our experience working with perpetrators and through research, it is clear that it is a deliberate choice and is not the result of anger management problems, stress or “learned behaviour” from childhood experiences. ⁷
10. Myth: <i>Once someone is abusive, they will always be abusive. Abuse is a cycle that cannot be broken.</i>	Reality: Abuse is a choice, which means that with support, perpetrators can choose to change. The traditional model of looking at abuse, The Cycle of Violence Theory, does not adequately account for victim’s resistance, social responses, or the social, material context in which the abuse happens. Victims do not choose abusive partners, as proven by the fact that the majority of perpetrators do not act abusively until after the victim has become emotionally and/or financially invested in the relationship, and present themselves as very attentive, loving and supportive in the early stages. For more information please see our booklet, “ Choosing to Change: A Handbook for Men concerned about their abusive behaviors towards those they love ” by Cindy Ogden, Nick Todd, and Gillian Weaver-Dunlop.
11. Myth: <i>Victims of family violence and abuse are passive and don’t stand up for themselves.</i>	Reality: Victims are not passive and do not ‘accept’ being mistreated. All victims resist abuse in various ways. Generally, resistance is covert as it can be very dangerous to resist abuse in overt, obvious ways. However, just because resistance can be difficult to notice, doesn’t mean it isn’t real and important. Recognizing and honouring the many ways that victims resist abuse and stand up for their dignity is a powerful way to respect their dignity and support their recovery. Please see our booklet, “ Honouring Resistance: How Women Resist Abuse in Intimate Relationships ”
12. Myth: <i>As a whole, our society is very compassionate and supportive to victims of family violence and abuse.</i>	Reality: Unfortunately, most victims report they are often not believed when they seek help for the abuse. They are often blamed and told what they “should” or “have” to do. These negative responses generally lead to victims feeling hesitant to reach out for help again and reduce the likelihood of them getting support. If victims get a positive response, namely one that believes them, isn’t judgmental about their choices or situation, and doesn’t overtly or even subtly blame them, then victims are more likely to get help and reduce their risks of ongoing violence and abuse. In our experience working with victims of family violence and abuse over the past forty years, it is very common for women to be told they are to blame, they need to just put up with the abuse, and/or they must be exaggerating.
13. Myth: <i>Victims choose to stay with the perpetrator and rarely tell anyone or seek help.</i>	Reality: In our experience, victims often turn to people they know for support or help. Unfortunately, they often don’t get the support and help they need. They are often judged, blamed and disbelieved or simply told they have to leave. But there are many challenges facing victims who may want to choose to leave including: financial difficulties, unavailability of affordable housing, lack of affordable childcare, safety concerns, pressures from family, friends, and culture to stay and keep the family intact despite the perpetrators acting abusively, and many more barriers exists. Victims may be unaware of the supports and resources available to them in the community that can help them overcome some of the barriers.
14. Myth: <i>The best way to help a victim of family violence and abuse is to tell them to leave the perpetrator.</i>	Reality: It is not our place to decide what the best choice is for someone else. Leaving the perpetrator can increase the danger for victims and may not be in their best interest. In our experience working with victims, we have learned that it is far more helpful to listen to victims in respectful, non-judgmental, compassionate ways that believe them and restore their dignity by honouring their resistance to the abuse. The way that family members, friends, co-workers, service providers and others respond to victims of abuse plays an important role in the decision-making processes for victims. For more information on how these social responses and social context influence victims’ choices and responses, please see our handbook, Respecting & Listening to Victims of Violence: A Handbook for those who are supporting women who have been abused by an intimate partner

1) <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence> or <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11643-eng.pdf>

2) <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010003/article/11352-eng.htm>

3) <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2010000-eng.pdf>

4) <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2010000-eng.pdf>

5) www.canadianwomen.org/sixtysevenpercent

6) <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/12/23/justice-canada-study-says-spousal-abuse-costs-country-at-least-7-4-billion-a-year/>

7) Salter, Anna. “Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists, and other Sex Offenders” (2003, Basic Books)