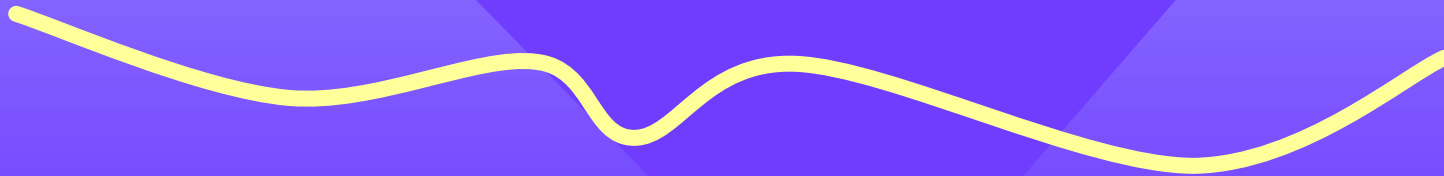
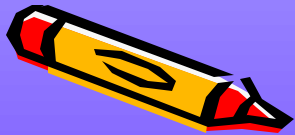




BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses

***Based on In-Depth Experience
of Children Who Witness
Abuse Programs
Across British Columbia***



Children Exposed to Domestic Violence Contributing Risk factors:

*Children's invisibility as victims of exposure to violence
towards their mothers*

Children at risk during custody and access disputes

Police and Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

*Risk Factors for Immigrant and Refugee Women and
Children*

Recommendations to address these risk factors



Children's invisibility as victims of exposure to violence towards their mothers

Children are the unacknowledged, hidden and silent victims during most 911 calls made in domestic violence cases

Children are referred into the Children Who Witness Abuse programs and services by mothers, transition house staff and seldom referred by the justice sector, community and educators

No clear and consistent data of children's presence at domestic violence incident collected and forwarded to provincial and national reporting bodies



Children at risk during custody and access disputes and visitations with abusive father

Children are caught up in traumatic custody and access disputes and adversarial joint custody decisions that can put them at further risk (the mother's safety can also be compromised by these processes)

Judicial system often participates in and perpetuates abusive dynamics by ordering women to facilitate visitations with the offenders

There is a risk of mother and child murders during custody and access disputes



Continuation ...

Women are afraid of being seen as “uncooperative” by the courts so they cooperate against the interests of their children

Women’s efforts to protect their children are often doubted, dismissed and punished

Women are often pressured into making dangerous agreements around their children

Access visits and mediation sessions allow women and children to be further stalked, harassed and physically assaulted



Police and Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Reported Problems

- Police and evidence: (No blood, no charges, children's presence dismissed)
- Police and information (Not always giving information to the mother to keep her and her children safe)
- Police and appropriate behavior (body language, ridiculing and woman blaming)
- Restraining Orders/ Peace Bonds (unable to get restraining orders and orders not being enforced)



Police and Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Reported Supportive Interactions

Compassion beyond duty

Empowering mothers / pressing charges

Information about resources (panic buttons, alarms etc)



Risk factors for Immigrant and Refugee Women and Children

Immigrant and refugee women and children who are abused by their sponsors face particular difficulties in accessing personal safety and protection

Fears about authority figures who include police and government officials (this perception emanates from their experiences)

Language barriers



Immigrant and refugee women may have other concerns including:

Will police be less sympathetic to their safety needs or those of their children?

They may be reluctant to put their abusive partner in a system that they may perceive as racist and unfair.

They may stay to protect their children and for fear that through leaving they will lose custody and access to their children



Recommendations to address the risk factors for children and their mothers

- Formation of Collaborative and consultative process at a local level between service agencies such as Transition Houses, Safe homes, Second Stage Homes and Children Who Witness Abuse Programs or similar services (community coordination and committee boards).
- Consultative interactions at a provincial level with provincial organizations across Canada (such as BC Yukon Society of Transition Houses who represents over 157 women and children serving organizations across BC and the Yukon) and Police.



This would achieve the following:

- ✓ Policy development
- ✓ Specialized training on abuse for everyone working in the criminal justice system
- ✓ Accessibility to safety and support for women and their children
- ✓ Increased referrals to CWWA programs or similar counseling support
- ✓ A less antagonistic or adversarial position would be developed between sectors.
- ✓ An acknowledgement of the problem and complexity of violence against women in relationships and its effects on children
- ✓ We could roll out lessons from Prevention programs such as the Violence Is Preventable Project where we are providing a coordinated link between schools and Children Who Witness Abuse programs. Such initiatives could be implemented with the Police and other justice sector personnel



- **Training on Domestic Violence and its effects on women and children to be part of the core curriculum for Police training at local and Provincial levels**
- **Multidisciplinary risk assessments of abusers, and assessments of the safety and well being of the women and children involved.**



References

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- Recommendation Report: Helping Women Who Have Experience Abuse to Help Their Children: A Participatory Action Research Initiative Addressing System and Community Post-Separation Factors
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- Best Practice Guidelines for Child Protection Workers in Cases of Domestic Violence:
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Please visit BC Yukon Society of Transition Houses website or more information on these materials.



BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses

<http://www.bcysth.ca>

**We need to find common ground to
work together to ensure women and
children's safety.**



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