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# News release

# Communiqué

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTINUES TO BE PROBLEM:  
SERIOUS IMPACTS ON CANADA'S HEALTH, JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SYSTEM**

**Ottawa** -- Thirteen years after the tragic deaths of 14 young women in Montreal, violence against women in Canada continues to be a significant and persistent social and economic problem. This key finding is contained in a major report called *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile*, which was released today by the Hon. Jean Augustine, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women).

In particular, the report demonstrates that young women are the most vulnerable to spousal assault, spousal homicide and sexual assault. The information in the report serves as an important 'red flag' that highlights this emerging problem of high rates of violence against young women and the increasing demand on social services for battered women.

"This report is a serious attempt to explore all forms of violence against women that Canadians have identified as unacceptable behaviour in our society," said Ms. Augustine. "It is my hope that publication of these preliminary indicators will give us all the opportunity to better understand the problem and monitor progress toward the prevention and elimination of violence against women."

### Findings in the report

- There is some evidence that the severity of assaults against women has declined slightly in addition to an actual decline in spousal homicide. However, it is still too early to draw any definitive conclusions on the questions of whether violence against women has actually decreased.
- Women under 25 make up the highest risk group, especially if they try to leave an abusive relationship.
- Aboriginal women are also particularly vulnerable to violence, spousal homicide rates of Aboriginal women were more than eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal women.
- Pregnancy does not translate into reduced violent treatment. In fact, 21% of female victims of spousal violence were abused during pregnancy and these men are among the most violent.

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- Low income and alcohol abuse by male partners are also linked to higher rates of assaults against women. Psychological abuse, such as intentionally damaging personal property, remains one of the most important risk factors for spousal assault. The report concludes that the combination of being young and separated elevates the risk of spousal homicide even more than the two factors taken individually.

“Young women were the victims at l’Ecole Polytechnique in 1989 and they continue to be vulnerable today,” said Ms. Augustine. The Minister’s release of this report occurs on the eve of the *National Day for Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women* on Friday December 6<sup>th</sup>.

Public attitude surveys from across the country, included in the document demonstrate that Canadians feel that the problem of family violence as promoted by women’s groups or the media is very real. The findings of public attitude surveys cited in the document also demonstrate that the public agrees that family violence is a crime and that women should be protected from family violence. Tracking public attitudes towards violence against women over time appears to offer a key indicator related to the incidence of such violence.

Three previous studies on the economic impacts of violence against women are cited in the report, showing the cost to Canadian society between \$1.5 billion to \$4.2 billion. Beside these cost estimates, there are also serious psychological and social impacts that are not as easy to measure.

Gaps in available statistics were also identified in the report. In particular there is not enough data available to measure violence against immigrant and refugee women and there is a paucity of victimization survey data related to sexual assaults.

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