

Federal Provincial- Territorial Status of Women Forum

Sexual Violence Knowledge Exchange

Summary Report

June 17, 2015
Winnipeg, Manitoba

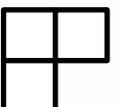


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Overview

On Wednesday, June 1, 2015, the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Status of Women Forum hosted a Sexual Violence Knowledge Exchange in Winnipeg, Manitoba. There were approximately 160 participants and the proceedings were webcast. The event featured speakers from across Canada and represented the diverse perspectives of academics, community-based organizations, service providers and youth leaders.

A one-day program with two keynote speakers and three panel discussions, the event was designed to draw attention to the following:

- the context in which sexual violence occurs and its links to broader issues of violence against women and girls and gender inequality (including violence against Indigenous women and girls);
- institutional responses to sexual violence (and where these responses fail);
- challenges related to reporting and disclosing sexual violence;
- diverse perspectives from anti-violence communities, including immigrant women, women with disabilities, transgender women and those working to engage men and boys in violence prevention; and
- perspectives on sexual violence and youth.

The **Sexual Violence Knowledge Exchange** included opening and closing prayers by Leslie Spillett, Executive Director of an Indigenous-led organization in Winnipeg, and a powerful performance by El Jones, then Halifax Poet Laureate, which reflected women's experiences of sexual violence. This helped root the knowledge exchange in the daily realities faced by women and girls. It situated the effects of sexual violence on the communities in which they live and supported the urgency of the discussions.

Among the key themes that emerged over the course of the day was the importance of using an intersectional analysis. This includes, for example, the overlap of colonialism, racism and sexism to understand of violence against Indigenous women and girls. There was broad agreement on the need to address the national crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Participants also emphasized that sexual violence impacts all women and girls and occurs at all stages of life.





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Participants discussed the experiences of diverse communities and the danger of telling only one story related to sexual violence. Relying on a single story negates the complexity of the issue and removes the agency of the women and girls involved. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of language in making visible the gendered nature of the crime of sexual violence. They also discussed the fact that sexual violence is the most under-reported crime and how institutional and cultural barriers can inhibit reporting.

The prevalence of rape culture was discussed, highlighted by high profile events such as the arrest of Jian Ghomeshi and the statement by General Tom Lawson (then Chief of the Defence Staff) that men are “biologically wired” for sexual harassment and rape. Participants echoed comments by Tracy Porteous of Ending Violence Association of British Columbia (EVA BC) that “now is the time for action” to end sexual violence and to inspire cultural change.

Summary of Presentations (in order of delivery)

Keynote Address – The Politics of Rape, Jane Doe

“Jane Doe” was the litigant in the case of *Jane Doe vs. the Toronto Police Force* nearly 30 years ago. In her presentation, she applied a cultural and anthropological lens to the issue of sexual assault, also addressing the inherent sexism and racism in the investigation of crimes involving violence against women. She critiqued the myth of non-violent rape and suggested that women need their own legal representation to be properly supported during trials. She argued that if we are going to encourage women who have been raped to come forward, we must ensure that they are able to do so in a safe, receptive and accessible environment that treats all women with dignity, respect and justice. Ms. Doe offered a critique of the public warnings commonly issued when a sexual predator is known to be active, which generally ask young women to take responsibility for protecting themselves from rape. She argued that only when the vast majority of men who do not rape become involved as active agents for change, and only when society understands and rejects the dominant constructions of masculinity that are conducive to sexual violence, will we meaningfully address crimes of sexual violence.





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Panel 1: Perspectives on reporting and disclosing instances of sexual violence

The first panel featured presentations by **Lise Gotell**, Professor, Women's and Gender Studies, University of Alberta; **Roxanne Paquette**, Coordinator, Provincial Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, Moncton, NB; **Tracy Porteous**, Executive Director, EVA BC; and **Renee-Claude Carrier**, Assistant Director, Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, Kaushee's Place.



Lise Gotell discussed consent education and its limits for preventing sexual assault, noting that it does have potential to improve the experience (and thereby increase the number) of those who report sexual assault. She argued that rather than sexual assault being a problem of miscommunication, it is a problem of refusing to stop making sexual advances despite a lack of consent. This refusal, Dr. Gotell stated, is rooted in notions of power and entitlement. She did note, however, that consent education could help more survivors identify their experience as assault. Dr. Gotell further argued that focusing consent awareness efforts on police could reduce the attrition of criminal cases.

Roxanne Paquette described the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program, which takes a nursing-based approach to caring for victims of sexual assault, and which helps those who have experienced sexual assault retain their sense of power and control. This program works to ensure consistent, caring, uninterrupted, supportive treatments to victims while also partnering with the community (e.g., Royal Canadian Mounted Police, legal system, victim services, etc.) to help prevent sexual assaults and intimate partner violence. She provided an overview of the benefits of the program and outlined plans to expand it to all health services in her home province of New Brunswick.





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Tracy Porteous issued a call to action, stating “the time is now” to end sexual violence. She provided an overview of the current situation and talked about the need to better understand the predatory, repetitive nature of sexual assault and its traumatic effects. She argued that society has not yet fully comprehended the wholly dehumanizing and humiliating aspects of sexual assault, and that this is related to low reporting rates. She spoke about EVA BC’s *Third Party Reporting of Sexual Assault* program, which allows reports to be sent to police by an intermediary community agency on behalf of a victim. She ended by emphasizing the importance of teaching everyone what constitutes healthy sexuality and by voicing her respect for the advocates who have been working on this for the past 40 years.

Renee-Claude Carrier focused on third party reporting, which Yukon has been using since 2014. This is particularly important in the northern context where rates are three to four times higher than the national average for all crimes involving violence against women. Ms. Carrier explained how third-party reporting works and outlined efforts to protect victims’ identifying information. She also spoke about the response-based language being used by staff and how it emphasizes the power dynamic inherent in sexual violence by, for example, referring to “mouth to mouth contact” rather than to “kissing.”

Panel 2: Perspectives from anti-violence communities

The second panel featured presentations by **Farrah Khan**, then Counsellor and Advocate, Barbra Schlifer Clinic, Toronto; **Bonnie Brayton**, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada (DAWN), Montréal; **Ian Neufeld La Rue**, Youth Health Educator, Teen Talk, Winnipeg; and **Kit Wilson-Yang**, Youth Outreach Worker, Toronto.





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Farrah Khan provided information about the Barbra Schlifer Clinic and the *Outburst!* program for young Muslim women to build community networks and find solutions to violence. With recent media attention on so-called “honour based violence,” *Outburst!* participants have reflected on the hazards of telling a single story and on who has the power to shape that story. Ms. Khan spoke about forced marriage as a form of sexual violence and how ideas about honour interact with rape culture. She concluded by speaking about how Islamophobia impacts the experience of Muslim women in accessing services.

Bonnie Brayton's presentation focused on the high rates of violence faced by deaf women and women with disabilities, and on the lack of policy attention paid to this reality. She highlighted the fact that women are becoming disabled through violence and noted that ableism is a form of violence against women. Ms. Brayton also provided an overview of DAWN's *Our Right to Be Safe* initiative, which identified gaps in services and supports for deaf women and women with disabilities.

Ian Neufeld La Rue described his work with *Teen Talk*, which offers youth a harm reduction, prevention and education perspective. The program brings together small groups of young men (15-16 years old) to talk about masculinity, pornography and consent. This provides space for the young men to challenge stereotypical notions of masculinity and come up with their own ideas of what they want their masculinity to be.

Kit Wilson-Yang reflected on her experience as a trans woman and as an outreach worker. She spoke about the reluctance among trans women to report sexual violence given their distrust of police, hospitals and health care settings that have traditionally excluded trans women from their services. She explained that violence against trans women is not adequately documented because data collection does not necessarily capture gender identity. She spoke about discrimination against trans women and the consequent social vulnerability they experience (lack of stable housing, employment, etc.). Ms. Wilson-Yang also raised the topic of Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, arguing that laws such as this push sex working trans women to the margins and make it more difficult for them to be safe from violence. She ended by encouraging service providers who do not actively work with trans women to develop ways to reach out to them.





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Keynote Address: Understanding Sexual Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls from within a Post-Colonial Analysis and Personal Narrative, Nahanni Fontaine



Nahanni Fontaine, then Manitoba Special Advisor on Aboriginal Women's Issues, focused her presentation on the history of colonialism in Canada and its role in violence against Indigenous women and girls. She noted that the colonization of the land was strategically and methodologically parallel to the colonization, marginalization, oppression and outright violence to the bodies, identities and spirits of Indigenous women and girls. She further shared her own experience of violence and her views on colonization and how it impacts the lives of women and girls. Ms. Fontaine noted that more and more attention is being paid to violence against Indigenous women and girls, and that while this is positive, there is much more work to be done. She closed by recognizing the resiliency of Indigenous women and girls, who even while deeply affected by the violence they and their loved ones have experienced, continue to demonstrate "amazing strength, resilience, courage and fight."

Panel 3: Perspectives on sexual violence and youth

The fourth panel featured presentations by **Cherry Smiley**, Youth Community Advocate, Vancouver; **Julie Lalonde**, Youth Community Advocate, Ottawa; **Gaye Watson Warthe**, Chair of the Faculty of Social Work and Disability Studies, Mount Royal University, Calgary; and **Jill Green**, Project Manager of *U-SOLVE* (University Students Offering Leadership for Violence Elimination), MacEwan University, Edmonton.





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Cherry Smiley described her experience as an Indigenous woman doing front-line work with family and community members on issues that impact Indigenous women and girls. She spoke about rape culture, the notion of male entitlement to sex, the “pornification” and hypersexualization of girls, and how the pornography industry is an example of ongoing colonialism. She discussed Indigenous women’s over-representation in prostitution, stating that these women are not actively choosing this work, and why she believes the abolition of prostitution is necessary.

Julie Lalonde spoke about the importance of bystander intervention and about her experience delivering the *Draw the Line* interactive campaign (launched in 2012) to youth and adults. The campaign challenges myths about sexual violence and seeks to equip bystanders to intervene safely and effectively in instances of sexual violence. Ms. Lalonde also spoke about her work with the *Hollaback!* movement, which works to end street harassment.

Gaye Warthe’s presentation focused on *Stepping Up*, a post-secondary education (PSE) response to preventing violence. She emphasized the fact that PSE students are at high risk of experiencing violence and that students entering PSE rarely have prior violence prevention programming of any kind. *Stepping Up* is a research-informed program that promotes awareness of healthy relationships, gender and media, bystander intervention and sexual relationships. Youth are directly involved in designing the curriculum and delivering this program.

Jill Green spoke about the *U-SOLVE* program, which focuses on the intersection of sexual violence and youth behaviour in post-secondary institutions. She provided context regarding rape culture and its impact on campus life (e.g., sexual violence prevention tips that limit young women’s behaviours and activities) and the way that survivors can be re-victimized by institutional apathy. She emphasized the importance of moving from rape culture to one of equality and consent. To illustrate this, *U-SOLVE* launched a cross-campus “privilege campaign” to draw the links between gendered violence and other systems of oppression and is doing bystander intervention training (based on *Stepping Up*).





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Wrap-Up



The day ended with an armchair discussion in which participants reflected on the key themes that had emerged over the course of their discussions. They emphasized intersectionality when speaking about the themes that resonated most strongly for them: the importance of education, particularly for police officers and others in the legal system; the desire for change now; and the possibility of replicating some of the programs that other panellists spoke about (e.g., third party reporting). Participants also spoke about the need for oversight of police by survivors and advocates and the need to measure outcomes. Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring responses to violence against migrant, immigrant and/or visible minority women engage communities in their development and do not push violence deeper underground .

