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Committee of the Whole (1)
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Item - Presentation #4



women's support network
of york region

Réseau de soutien pour les femmes
de la région de York

The Women's Support Network of York Region

Speaker: Lindsay Carbonero, Board Member

Shannon Seeraj, Program Manager

September 13th, 2022

Request to The City of Vaughan
to Endorse a Resolution for
Increased and Sustainable Funding for
Community-Based Sexual Assault Support Centres

Prepared by: Jacqueline Benn-John, Ph.D., Executive Director
Women's Support Network of York Region

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Fall 2022***

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**Backgrounder – WSN Advocating with The City of Vaughan to endorse a resolution calling upon the Province of Ontario to provide increased and sustainable funding for community-based Sexual Assault Support Centres
Fall 2022**

**Women's Support Network of York Region:
Request to The City of Vaughan
to endorse a resolution calling upon the Province of Ontario to
provide increased and sustainable funding for
community-based Sexual Assault Support Centres**

Prepared by Jacqueline Benn-John, Executive Director
Women's Support Network of York Region (WSN)

Some facts:

- 1 in 3 women experience sexual assault in their lifetime.
- 1 in 6 men experience sexual assault in their lifetime.
- Trans-individuals (trans women and trans men) are at higher risk of sexual violence¹. Existing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize and minimize sexual violence against women, girls², as well as trans and non-binary persons³.
- Sexual crimes are by far the most common offence against girls⁴. For boys, being under 12 years old heightens their vulnerability to being targeted for sexual offences⁵.
- Indigenous and people of color in Canada are at increased risk of violence: for example, a Canadian national inquiry found that Indigenous women and girls are 16 times more likely to be killed or to disappear than white women⁶.

Crime statistics, however, only reflect a small minority of the gender-based violence (GBV) that occurs. Most sexual violence cases do not engage the criminal justice system⁷. This means that the prevalence of sexual violence in Ontario is in fact much higher than the numbers shown here.

History of our services and increasing resource challenge

- Women's Support Network of York Region has been operating in the region since 1992.
- Since that time, we have provided many years of support and advocacy for survivors in the region, and offered prevention education to the community.
- During this time, the number of survivors wanting to access our counselling programs has increased substantially, without the provincial funds increasing to meet this demand.
- Our centre supports survivors of recent sexual violence, as well as survivors of historical sexual violence: for example, child sexual abuse, or adult sexual assault that occurred many weeks, months or years before.
- In the sexual and gender-based violence sector, under resourced agencies like ours must compete for project-based funding, spending scarce resources to repeatedly write grants, rather than having basic costs of operation increases to our base budgets.

¹ Factor & Rothblum, (2007).

² World Health Organization. *Understanding and addressing violence against women*. Online: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

³ TransPulse Ontario

⁴ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Released on February 25, 2013. *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends*. p. 15

⁵ Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006, Statistics Canada

⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Report released June 2019. Online: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>

⁷ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

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- Training and recruiting staff is difficult in our sector, with highly specialized skills and low wages and benefits relative to other mental health funded positions.

No increased funding from provincial government again this year despite increased service demand from pandemic

- Awareness of sexual violence is increasing—a significant and positive achievement. More and more, survivors of violence are reaching out for support. Since 2014, sexual assault centres across Ontario have seen a significant influx of new referrals, crisis line calls and intake for counselling services.
- Most existing Ontario sexual assault centres have been operating in Ontario since the 1990s. During this time, the number of survivors accessing crisis counselling and long term counselling or therapy programs has multiplied—in some regions by up to 4 times⁸; yet funding has simply not kept pace.
- Instead, Ontario sexual assault centres have seen cuts, (5% 1995) nominal increases (2004-2005, an annualized 5% increase to re-instate the previous government's cutback; 3% 2007-2008) and some small increases connected to provincial action plans (2011, 2015) that were not always continued.
- In 2018, the then-Ontario government announced an approximately 30% increase to the sexual violence sector in Ontario. The 2018 announcement would have realized a significant increase for Ontario's community-based sexual assault centres. Despite this commitment, under the current provincial government, the [funding increase never became reality](#).
- In its 2021 budget, Ontario allocated some positive investments to address gender-based violence. The budget also saw some investment in victim services – 2.1 million over 3 years to improve victim and new sexual assault services in three underserved Ontario locations
- Of these dollars, however, none find their way directly to Ontario's existing sexual assault centres such as Women's Support Network of York Region.
- Other arms of government have recognized the need for a better-resourced violence response. For example, in August 2022, The City of Kingston; June 2022, The Region of Waterloo, and in December 2021, The Town of Bracebridge passed a resolution recognizing the need for increased community-based sexual assault centre funding, and encouraging the province to provide increased and sustainable funding for sexual assault services⁹. **Will The City of Vaughan do the same?**

Legal barriers to sexual assault are not getting better

- In August 2022, Statistics Canada released its findings of *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2021*. There were more than 34,200 reports of sexual assault in Canada in 2021, an 18 per cent increase from 2020,¹⁰ and in September 2019, Statistics Canada released its findings of *Incident-based crime statistics*¹¹ in Canada. These statistics – aligning with our experiences – reveal that sexual assault in Ontario rose from 7,434 police-reported incidences

⁸ Provided by Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services in December 2021.

⁹ Hartill, Mary Beth, for The Bracebridge Examiner/Toronto Star. January 7, 2022. *Say it in numbers: Bracebridge council backing victims of sexual assault A look at the numbers behind sexual assault services in Parry Sound-Muskoka*. Online: <https://www.thestar.com/local-bracebridge/news/council/2022/01/07/say-it-in-numbers-bracebridge-council-backing-victims-of-sexual-assault.html>

¹⁰ Statistics Canada. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2021*. Data release – August 3, 2022. Online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00013-eng.htm>.

¹¹ Statistics Canada. *Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, Canada, provinces, territories and Census Metropolitan Areas*. Data release - July 22, 2019. Online:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510017701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.16&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.16>

Backgrounder – WSN Advocating with The City of Vaughan to endorse a resolution calling upon the Province of Ontario to provide increased and sustainable funding for community-based Sexual Assault Support Centres
Fall 2022

in 2016 and 8,782 in 2017 to 10,634 in 2018 — a year over year increase of almost 19%. The *Incident-based crime statistics* draws on data¹² on police reported crimes.

- As many sexual violence survivors choose not to engage the criminal justice system¹³, this means that the prevalence of sexual violence in Ontario is in fact far higher.
- The majority of all reported sexual assault cases are simply not resolved through the criminal justice system. According to Canadian research¹⁴, 33 out of every 1,000 sexual assault cases are reported to the police, and just 29 are actually recorded as a crime. These numbers speak volumes about how many are not held accountable, as well as why survivors may be afraid to report.
- In 2020, the York Regional Police Service received 691 reports of Sexual Assault violations¹⁵. This represents a minority of survivors we work with, year over year. WSN Research and experience tell us this represents about 5% of the sexual assaults happening in our community each year.
- WSN has always provided support to survivors of sexual violence who are reporting to the police, as well as those who choose *not to report* (or who do not see their case proceed through the system). In this, WSN is seeing far many more sexual violence cases than is apparent to the local criminal justice system in our region, or apparent to the public.
- We encourage municipalities to consult with sexual and gender-based violence agencies regarding community wellness and safety planning, not simply with police, for these reasons.

Impact of the pandemic

- The economic fallout from business closures, job loss and other impacts can also lead to increased risk for intimate partner violence, risky coping strategies including survival sex, and increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse¹⁶.
- Crisis events such as pandemics tend to worsen pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities. Racialized communities, those living in poverty “and other groups that have traditionally been marginalized, tend to be harmed by a disaster more” than others¹⁷.
- The Learning Network on Violence Against Women notes that “recommended public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as social/physical distancing and the closure of non-essential services may increase exposure to violence (e.g. intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child maltreatment), in addition to changing the landscape of support-seeking”¹⁸.

¹² The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), in co-operation with the policing community, collects police-reported crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR). The UCR Survey was designed to measure the incidence of crime in Canadian society and its characteristics. See [this link](#) for more information on the data collected in the survey.

¹³ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html

¹⁴ Patel, A. October 30, 2014. for Huffington Post Canada. 460,000 Sexual Assaults In Canada Every Year: YWCA Canada. Online: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/30/sexual-assault-canada_n_6074994.html.

¹⁵ York Regional Police Annual Statistics Report, January-December 2021. Online: https://www.yrp.ca/en/about/resources/2020_Annual_Statistics_Report.pdf.

¹⁶ Global Protection Cluster GBV Protection and Response and Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Last updated: 6 April 2020. *Identifying & Mitigating Gender-based Violence Risks within the COVID-19 Response*. Online: <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Interagency-GBV-risk-mitigation-and-Covid-tipsheet.pdf>: 10.

¹⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2015. Unseen, unheard: Gender-based violence in disasters. Online: https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201511/1297700_GBv_in_Disasters_EN_LR2.pdf: 16

¹⁸ The Learning Network on Violence Against Women. *Resources on Gender-Based Violence and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Online: <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/Resources%20on%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20and%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.html>

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- With the pandemic, the Women's Support Network of York Region saw:
 - 39% increase of participants in its individual sexual violence trauma counselling service
 - 68% increase in calls on our 24/7 crisis line and messages on the online chat service
 - 72% increase in Public Education participants
 - 82 survivors of human trafficking or at-risk of human trafficking seeking virtual group support

Advocacy by towns/municipalities

- The advocacy of our municipality and others for our centre and other Sexual Assault Centres in the province is greatly needed and appreciated.
- We hope that **The City of Vaughan** can take leadership by recognizing the need for increased community-based sexual assault centre funding and encouraging the province to provide increased and sustainable funding for sexual assault centres like The Women's Support Network of York Region.
- We hope that **The City of Vaughan** can take leadership with towns across York Region in urging other communities to advocate for increased resources and much-needed change on sexual violence supports.
- Increased resources make a tangible difference in our community: it means more support options for people experiencing sexual violence, less time waiting for counselling, and faster prevention education, so that young people know their rights and where to get help.

Further information and reading

Ontario Sexual Assault Centres and funding:

- For past work of efforts to ensure financial stability of the sector see:
<https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/tag/survivorscantwait/>
- <https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/ontario-budget-2021-and-gender-based-violence-spending-ontario-coalition-of-rape-crisis-centres-ocrcc-responds/>

Gender-based violence and sexual violence in Canada:

- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510017701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.16&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.16> (Ontario)
- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.htm>

For More Information:

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Women's Support Network of York Region:
Request to The City of Vaughan
Resolution
2022

1. Item for Discussion – Support for Women's Support Network of York Region to Receive Increased and Sustainable Provincial Funding

WHEREAS Women's Support Network of York Region has provided support and advocacy for survivors of recent or historical sexual violence, and prevention education in York Region since 1992;

AND WHEREAS the number of survivors needing access to crisis counselling and long-term counselling programs has increased since 1992;

AND WHEREAS ongoing underfunding of Women's Support Network of York Region has reduced the number of resources available to provide these services due to highly specialized skill requirements that are unmatched by low wages and benefits relative to other mental health funded positions;

AND WHEREAS the current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased people in the community requiring the services of Women's Support Network of York Region;

AND WHEREAS sexual violence disproportionately impacts our community's most vulnerable members including women and girls, trans, and non-binary people, people with disabilities, and people who identify as Black, First Nations, Metis, Indigenous, racialized, and/or 2SLGBTQIA+¹;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT increased and sustainable provincial funding for Women's Support Network of York Region funding and other community-based sexual assault centres be supported for priority consideration by the Provincial Government and its agencies.

¹ 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym that stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexual orientations and gender identities.



SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ONTARIO: SURVIVORS SEEKING SUPPORT



During the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence increased worldwide (Canadian Red Cross, 2021). Ontario sexual assault centres have been providing *more* support, yet with the same resources with which they've operated for years.

IN 2021, ONTARIO SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRES...

**Responded to
over 37,500
crisis calls:**

**phone, texting and online
crisis chat**

**IN 2019, THIS
NUMBER WAS
23,000**



**Saw over 6400
people in
counselling**

**individual and group
supports**

**IN 2019, THIS
NUMBER WAS
5400**



Sexual assault centres have been supporting survivors of violence in Ontario since the 1970s.

The number of people accessing crisis support and counselling has multiplied in that time—in some regions **by up to 4 times.**



Yet funding for these services has not kept pace.

#SurvivorsFirst

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) includes over 30 community-based sexual assault centres in Ontario. This infographic was compiled in 2022, using data collected over a nine-month period in both 2019 and in 2021, and provided by a sample of 18 OCRCC member centres. If you or someone you know has been affected by sexual violence, go to: www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/support.







