

# **Design of a pilot program to deliver transitional employment supports to women who experience violence**

## **Literature Review**

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Women's Policy Office  
*and*  
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# Design of Transitional Employment Supports for Victims of Violence

## Literature Review

### Definitions

Economic security: the availability of a steady and reliable source of income to sustain daily living for oneself and one's family and to allow planning for the future.<sup>1</sup>

Employability: an inclusive term that means being physically, emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically able to work. It means having the skills and tools to get and maintain employment, it involves the person's personal and social environment as well as all the aspects of a woman's life which affect her work.<sup>2</sup>

### Consequences of intimate partner violence:<sup>3</sup>

- ◇ Physical injury/disabilities (i.e.: cuts, bruises, black eyes, miscarriages, bone injuries, splenic and liver trauma, partial loss of hearing and vision, and scars from burn and knife wounds)
- ◇ Emotional distress/psychiatric disabilities (i.e.: depression, anxiety, and/or PTSD)
- ◇ Interference with role/job function
- ◇ Loss of employment
- ◇ Poverty
- ◇ Homelessness
- ◇ Loss of role identity
- ◇ Decreased decision-making and problem-solving skills
- ◇ Feelings of worthlessness and lowered self-esteem
- ◇ Loss of motivation to make changes in one's life
- ◇ Loss of family ties and social supports
- ◇ Loss of children
- ◇ Victimization also has a high rate of co-occurrence with substance abuse

### Impacts of violence on employability

The following observations on the impact of violence on employability are from the Bridges to Employment for Women, a community –based group in British Columbia that, for the past twenty years, has been offering employment programming to women who have experienced violence and abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>2</sup> A Women's Resource Booklet: Overcoming the Impact of Abuse on Employability. (2007). Bridges to Employment for Women. Victoria BC

<sup>3</sup> Helfrich, C.A., & Rivera, Y. (2006). Employment skills and domestic violence survivors: a shelter-based intervention. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*, 22(1), 33 – 48.

### *Activation*

When a threat of abuse is perceived, a woman's flight-or-fight response is aroused. Her body prepares to fight or flee, resulting in tightened muscles, the senses becoming more acute. This can look like hypervigilance (always on alert or on guard), difficulty concentrating and /or excessive anger. Often since the body is flooded with brain chemicals and adrenal gland secretions, judgement and cognition are not as sharp as they could be. This effect leads to several employment barriers: lack of concentration, anxiety, trouble working with anyone who exhibited characteristics of abuser, highs and lows in energy levels, and difficulty engaging or maintaining disciplined practice, and inappropriate self disclosure (often saying too much) (Ibid., p.13).

### *Severe stress reactions*

While living with fear or repression develops strength through survival, it is often at the expense of physical and psychological health. Physical manifestations of stress include fatigue, anxiety, sleep disorders, headaches. Psychological responses include depression, anxiety, suspicion and secrecy. The employment barriers that result include missing time at work, addictions communications problems with co-workers, abusive behaviour towards co-workers, inability to keep a job beyond short-term attempts (Ibid, p. 12).

### *Dissociation*

This is defined as a psychological response to abuse that develops as a coping strategy. A woman who experienced abuse as a child may have dissociated and left her body, or developed alternate personalities, and these ways of behaving may have continued into adulthood. The resulting employment barriers are forgetfulness, poor concentration, inability to 'be present', mental health problems, and poor self care (Ibid., p.15). Dissociation and the complexities of learners "presence" has also been identified as a challenge to learning in adult literacy programs (Horsman, p.184).

### *Keeping peace at all costs*

Abuse survivors spend a great deal of time and energy avoiding situations that might provoke the abuser. This "peace at all costs" behaviour may transfer over into the workplace. The associated employment barriers including controlling behaviours, withdrawing well-founded personal views if they are challenges, being more vulnerable to abuse or manipulation (Ibid., p. 16).

### *Powerlessness*

Experience with repeated violence often leads to feeling of powerlessness that can affect other areas of life. Employment barriers related to powerlessness include inability to decide on a job or career direction, difficulty with authority figures (Ibid., p. 17).

### *Impaired boundaries*

When someone is abused, his or her boundaries are violated. The survivor may allow people to violate their boundaries or may have a poor sense of what is healthy or appropriate for them. Related employment barriers include: anxiety when being observed, vulnerability to sexual, racial or other harassment, alienation of co-workers, no clear sense of self (Ibid., p. 17).

### *Impaired self-esteem*

Women who have experienced violence often report that their self-esteem is low. In terms of employment barriers, low self-esteem can lead to doubting one's competence, assuming guilt and responsibility for other's behaviour, and self-sabotage (Ibid., p. 18).

### *Silence and isolation*

In an abusive situation, speaking may have been defined as "mouthing off" that deserved a violent response. Silence means isolation from others and keeping a lid on feelings. Being isolated from a support network (including preventing the woman from going to school or work) may have been a part of the abuse, and this network later becomes difficult for the survivor to develop for herself. In terms of employment, this may lead to such barriers as panic attacks when required to speak out, poor assertiveness, inability to fit into education or training programs and a limited support network (Ibid., p. 18).

### *Physical health issues*

The experience of trauma can lead to physical health issues. Those who experience barriers to employment may have limited resources to maintain health. They may also have a number of physical disabilities as a result of the abuse which impair the ability to do certain jobs. Employment barriers include being unable to do work that requires certain physical strengths, limited energy to work (Ibid., p.22).

### *Mental health issues*

Survivors of abuse may experience direct effects of abuse on their mental health including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Those who face barriers to work may have limited resources for counselling or medications to maintain their mental health. Many doctors do not understand women's experience of violence and inappropriately treat them. Associated employment barriers include: absence from work, employers not approving time off for hospitalization or treatment, inability to communicate to an employer what is happening, side effects of medication, cognitive impairment, and a history of mental illness which may follow the woman into recovery and pose challenges to employment (Ibid., p. 23).

### *Chaos and crisis as a way of life*

Sometimes survivors of abuse develop a 'comfort zone' that is very hard to break away from – a chaotic life is the only one that feels comfortable. A woman who has lived in constant trauma often feels more comfortable reacting to problems than dealing with

everyday routine. She may catastrophize – make chaotic or dramatic everyday situations and events. Chaos and crisis as a way of life can lead to boredom with a regular schedule, creating disruptive incidents a school or work, demands on others, inappropriate use of work time to make crisis-related personal calls, history of leaving jobs due to crises, disrupted parenting and /or involvement with child protection services, courts (Ibid., p. 26).

### *Substance abuse or misuse*

Women who have experienced violence may turn to substances to help remove them from the pain and trauma caused by their experiences. Patterns of addiction are often learned from families of origin and /or partners. Once established these addictions become a driving force and are hard to break. Similar addictive behaviour may occur around sex, gambling, relationships or food. Employment barriers that result may include: physical or mental deterioration, absences from work, lifestyle choices that clash with work values, financial crises or worries (Ibid., p. 32).

### *Disrupted education*

The schooling of women who were abused or witnessed abuse as children may have been affected. Absences and inability to concentrate may have resulted in low marks or dropping out. The woman's attempts to get upgrading or training as an adult may have been undermined or prevented by abusive relationships. Disrupted education can impact employability in a number of ways: limited job choices, reluctance to participate in and low comfort level in educational setting, fear of failure, underdeveloped study skills, belief that she cannot learn, trauma related learning disabilities, inability to learn at work (Ibid., p. 33).

Jenny Horsman, a researcher and educator in adult literacy has done extensive research on the impact of violence on women's learning. In a recent article, she drew on three Canadian research studies to question conventional understanding that access to adult literacy education is simply a matter of providing programs.<sup>4</sup> She concluded that women who experience violence are often not given permission to participate by abusers or are told they are "too stupid to learn" and come to believe this themselves. She concluded that the unacknowledged impacts of trauma on learning may mean that many women only get a chance to fail; this in turn may lead to the learners, educators and other working with women in the aftermath of violence to become frustrated with the lack of possibilities for educational success (Ibid., p.178).

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<sup>4</sup> Horsman, Jenny. (2006). Moving beyond stupid: Taking account of the impact of violence on women's learning. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 26(2006), 177-188

## Challenges faced by victims of violence

### Education/training:

- ◇ Gap clients: fewer women now qualify for employment insurance - this affects their access to skills development programs under Part II of the EI Act.<sup>5</sup>
  - There is little transition-to-employment programming available to low-income women who are not eligible for either social assistance or for Employment Insurance.<sup>6</sup>
- ◇ There is also a lack of support for women who are in low-paying jobs – difficult for them to upgrade skills without going into debt.
- ◇ Need a systematic process for recognizing prior learning or skills gained on-the-job so that women may move into new opportunities.<sup>7</sup>
  - Prior-learning mechanisms and processes should be developed so that women can transfer within and between community-based learning and other transition-to-employment programs, and between these and the various programs offered through post-secondary institutions.<sup>8</sup>
- ◇ Literature shows that a Grade 12 equivalency and access to post-secondary education are essential to acquiring well-paid work.<sup>9</sup>
- ◇ Barriers to post-secondary education have increased:<sup>10</sup>
  - Higher tuition fees
  - Single-parents enrolled in post-secondary programs oftentimes are not eligible for social assistance.
  - Women will usually finish post-secondary education programs with a debt load that is unequal to men who hold the same degrees because women tend to earn lower incomes.

### Employment:

- ◇ There are an increasing number of women working in precarious jobs (temporary, part-time, casual, or other non-standard forms of employment) that are characterized by low wages and few benefits.<sup>11</sup>
  - Precarious employment often leads to long-term financial insecurity or poverty because these women are usually ineligible for non-statutory employment benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, and pensions.

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<sup>5</sup> Lord, S. & Martell, A. (2004). Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Access Diminished: A Report on Women's Training and Employment Services in Ontario. (June 2000). Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women, ACTEW.

<sup>8</sup> Lord, S. & Martell, A. (2004). Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>11</sup> Lord, S. & Martell, A. (2004). Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

- ◇ Women sometimes are reluctant to leave welfare because low-wage jobs are less stable, usually incompatible with parental obligations (long hours, early morning or late evening shifts), and seldom lead to improvements for future job opportunities.<sup>12</sup>
- ◇ Women who are self-employed do not receive benefits.<sup>13</sup>
- ◇ Women may not have appropriate references when applying for jobs.
- ◇ Abusers may use various forms of harassment in an attempt to prevent women from retaining employment and through it, their self-sufficiency. Examples of possible forms of harassment include the following actions:<sup>14</sup>
  - Abuser keeps woman from sleeping.
  - Women are threatened to the point that they are afraid to go to work or school.
  - Abuser repeatedly calls woman at work.
  - Abuser follows/stalks the woman.
  - Abuser spreads false allegations about the woman.
  - Abuser refuses to care for children at the last minute.
  - Abuser refuses to provide woman with transportation to work at the last minute.
  - Women are beaten so that they could not go to work or to school.
  - Abuser forces woman to do illegal things.

#### **Financial Planning:**

- ◇ Many women lack knowledge of financial management and budgeting.
- ◇ Women may not have had access to money for years – no credit rating, no relationship with a bank, no access to emergency cash.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Health/Wellness:**

- ◇ The RCMP rarely removes abusers from the family home.
  - Some housing co-ops across Canada have implemented by-laws to evict people who have been convicted or accused of domestic violence. Evictions do not occur without due process and not until criminal justice procedures have been put into motion. Housing co-ops will also provide rent subsidies to women if they are unable to cover their rent after their violent partner had been evicted.<sup>16</sup>
- ◇ When women do seek help from the police or justice system, they are sometimes met with disbelief and disrespect. This causes women to feel “re-victimized” and also leaves them vulnerable to further abuse.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Report of Focus Groups. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>14</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>15</sup> Breaking the Links between Poverty and Violence Against Women: A Resource Guide. (1996). Family Violence Prevention Unit, Health Canada.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

- ◇ Women sometimes stay in the abusive environment because they fear losing their access to health insurance if they leave their abusive partner.<sup>18</sup>

### **Housing:**

- ◇ Lack of second-stage housing
- ◇ Low-income or subsidized housing is often not available or adequate, even when priority is given to women leaving abusive relationships.<sup>19</sup>
- ◇ Insufficient number of apartments for single parents – long waiting list.<sup>20</sup>
  - Apartments are poorly maintained.
  - Single working parents cannot afford the rent, which can sometimes be 30% of their gross income.
  - Tenants are sometimes chosen depending on their situations – can result in a long referral process.
- ◇ Single women may have to prove their necessity for housing (as opposed to living in a boarding house).<sup>21</sup>
- ◇ Women are unable to connect utilities without a deposit or credit account.<sup>22</sup>

### **Legal:**

- ◇ Court process is deemed to take too long by some victims of violence.
- ◇ Women often feel that the lawyers assigned to them are not able to represent them adequately because the lawyers are not familiar with their cases (i.e.: women will see lawyer for the first time 5-10 minutes before their trial starts).<sup>23</sup>

### **Transportation:**

- ◇ Support is needed for moving costs if women want to relocate (include a start-up fund).
- ◇ In some areas of Newfoundland and Labrador, people rely on ski-doo's for firewood and hunting. However, the cost of a new or used skidoo is often unattainable for many women, and they are unable to obtain a loan without showing proof of full-time work and a sufficient salary.<sup>24</sup>
- ◇ In rural or remote areas, having access to a car or snowmobile is a necessity for transportation to workplace, educational institution, or child care facilities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Report of Focus Groups. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>19</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>20</sup> Economic Independence and Security Focus Group – Nain, NL. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>21</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Meeting Report. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>22</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Report of Focus Groups. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

### **Welfare/Assistance:**

- ◇ Adequate income - income from social assistance or minimum wage jobs is often not enough to support women and their children.
  - Social assistance - provides income that is below poverty lines and also has low levels of in-come cut-offs – women oftentimes go without necessities for themselves in order to meet the needs of their children.<sup>26</sup>
  - If a woman receives social assistance and becomes a client at a shelter, her rate is lowered to the comfort allowance (~\$125/month).<sup>27</sup>
- ◇ Women may be required to repay income assistance if they receive a “windfall” (i.e.: inheritance).<sup>28</sup>
- ◇ In some provincial governments, women’s monthly social assistance payments are reduced by the amount of the National Child Benefit.

Note: A study conducted by Wettersten et al. (2004) showed that many of the effects of intimate partner violence were compounded by the simultaneous experience of residing in a shelter. For example, in terms of women’s employment, the most significantly affected were women’s abilities to concentrate, manage harassment at work, maintain self-esteem, avoid absenteeism, and take advantage of work opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

### **Types of supports that could be offered to victims of violence**

- ◇ Individual assessments
- ◇ Personal supports
  - Counseling
  - Peer support
  - Child care – needs to be available on a flexible schedule to accommodate work and personal needs.
    - Most organized child care services do not accommodate evening or shift work.<sup>30</sup>
  - Elder and disability care supports
  - Transportation allowance
  - Legal Aid – need access to legal aid for issues such as negotiating child custody, child support, emergency protection orders, division of property (Note: Aboriginal women living on reserves need agreements to protect their equality rights to matrimonial property).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>27</sup> Economic Independence and Security Focus Group – Nain, NL. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>28</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Report of Focus Groups. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>29</sup> Wettersten, K. B., Rudolph, S. E., Faul, K., Gallagher, K., Trangsrud, H. B., Adams, K., et al. (2004). Freedom through self-sufficiency: a qualitative examination of the impact of domestic violence on the working lives of women in shelter. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 51(4), 447-462.

<sup>30</sup> Economic Independence for Women Leaving or Living in Abusive Relationships: Summary Discussion Paper. (October 2002). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

- Safety precautions
- Life skills training<sup>32</sup>
- ◇ Financial and health/medical benefits
- ◇ Housing supports
- ◇ Career counseling
- ◇ Access to training
- ◇ Access to employment
  - Job brokering
  - Wage subsidies
- ◇ Job retention supports

### **Program components**

- ◇ Rapid-start employment strategies are most effective with job-ready social assistance recipients, but appear to have limited long-term impacts.<sup>33</sup>
- ◇ No quick, easy solutions – successful transitional support programs usually last between 1-3 years in length, with continuous intakes of clients.<sup>34</sup>
- ◇ Income support programs need core/permanent funding so that the women will be able to move through a process of personal development/training that could result in more meaningful employment.<sup>35</sup> These programs could include the following components:
  - A continuum of services with access from multiple locations<sup>36</sup>
  - Bridging or pre-employment programs that focus on self-esteem building, confidence building, transferable skills, workplace preparation, orientation, employability skills, disability issues, literacy<sup>37</sup>
  - Transitional programs could be developed to include educational upgrading, orientation to trades, technology training with mentoring and ongoing support, and training in community economic development skills<sup>38</sup>
  - Employment supports that are provided for both the transitional period (of one to two years) and at least the first year in a job.<sup>39</sup>
  - A follow-up component

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<sup>32</sup> Gorde, N., Helfrich, C. A., & Finlayson, M. L. (2004). Trauma symptoms and life skill needs of domestic violence victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(6), 691 – 708.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Lord, S. & Martell, A. (2004). Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

<sup>35</sup> Women's Economic Independence and Security Focus Group – Marystown, NL. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

<sup>36</sup> Access Diminished: A Report on Women's Training and Employment Services in Ontario. (June 2000). Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women, ACTEW.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Lord, S. & Martell, A. (2004). Building Transitions to Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

- ◇ Transitional programs may need to form strong partnerships and referral systems in order to match women with the types of support they need in their unique situations.
- ◇ Job placement components would require supportive partnerships between employers and training delivery agency.<sup>40</sup>
- ◇ Nine essential skills have been recognized by the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada as critical for employment in today's labour market – reading text, working with others, thinking skills, continuous learning, writing, oral communication, document use, numeracy, and computer use.

### **Program delivery**<sup>41</sup>

- ◇ For group sessions, the size of the group will ideally range between eight to twelve participants.
- ◇ Consider offering sessions in the late morning or if the group involves working women, an evening or weekend schedule may be needed.
  - Take into consideration the distances that women have to travel on public transportation and the hours that children are in school.
- ◇ Services and sessions should be held in locations that are known to women and accessible by public transportation.
- ◇ Transportation costs should be covered (i.e.: tickets may be provided for public transportation system or a gas allowance given to those who drive).
  - Some women may require greater assistance to reach service/session locations:
    - Women who have two or more very young children.
    - Women who live in areas where public transit is infrequent or non-existent.
    - Women who have physical or emotional problems that prevent them from using public transit.
- ◇ It is important to choose a space that all women will feel is welcoming and safe.
- ◇ Group or individual sessions should take place in a location that is situated near a child-care room or facility.
  - Ideally, on-site child care should be provided for pre-school children during the day and for all children in the late afternoon and evening.
  - It is oftentimes more cost-effective for organizations to provide child care services than to reimburse women for their child care expenses.
  - Women may also not know of anyone whom they can depend on to care for their children on a regular basis.
- ◇ Activities or services for low-income women should be free or offered at a very low cost. If there is a charge, there should be considerable flexibility built into

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<sup>40</sup> Access Diminished: A Report on Women's Training and Employment Services in Ontario. (June 2000). Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women, ACTEW.

<sup>41</sup> Breaking the Links between Poverty and Violence Against Women: A Resource Guide. (1996). Family Violence Prevention Unit, Health Canada.

- the payment scheme. For example, instead of paying for childcare, mothers may also be given the options of donating food or toys.
- ◇ The provision of nutritional snacks may help to create a pleasant atmosphere during group sessions, and can also contribute to women's health for those who are unable to afford adequate diets.

### **Service providers**

- ◇ Holistic approach: a world view that looks at healing and other aspects of life comprehensively, integrating all aspects of health such as the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional. A holistic approach to service provision also considers the individual woman in the context of the family, the family in the context of the community, the community in the context of the larger society, and lastly, the impact that socioeconomic barriers such as poverty, unemployment, welfare dependence, and poor housing has on women's well-being.<sup>42</sup>
- ◇ Service providers must be prepared to address the personal, social, and economic barriers that abused women face because of discrimination based on their gender, race, income level, disability, age, sexual orientation, and culture.<sup>43</sup>
- ◇ Service providers should gain an understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner violence and the risk of death and injury to the women and children.
  - Cross-training is a recommended method for educating service providers about women abuse. Representatives from different professional groups and services are trained together and are able to provide their perspectives on the issues.<sup>44</sup>
- ◇ It is important for intake staff to be nonjudgmental and prepared for callers who are frightened or in crisis.
- ◇ Due to the stressful nature of the job requirements, shelter staff should be provided with training and information-sharing opportunities with respect to issues such as vicarious trauma and burn-out symptoms and strategies for dealing with these conditions.<sup>45</sup>
- ◇ There is a high-turnover rate for shelter staff – the on-call rate is usually not adequate to support staffs' families.<sup>46</sup>

### **Other issues for consideration**

- ◇ Women living in rural or remote regions:
  - Lack of transportation – may not have a car, no public transportation in the community.

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<sup>42</sup> Breaking the Links between Poverty and Violence Against Women: A Resource Guide. (1996). Family Violence Prevention Unit, Health Canada.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Tutty, L. M. (2006). Effective Practices in Sheltering Women: Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships. YWCA Canada.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Economic Independence and Security Focus Group – Nain, NL. (2003). Circle of Prevention.

- May have difficulty accessing program components – consider online training supports (Bridges Program, Victoria).
  - May not be able to afford costs of making long-distance phone calls to service providers.
  - Reliance on neighbours for assistance may be unsafe and could lead to community gossip.
  - It may be difficult to provide confidential services to women in small and on-reserve communities.
- ◇ Aboriginal women:<sup>47</sup>
- One's family and culture are very important aspects of Aboriginal women's lives.
  - Aboriginal women are oftentimes pressured by the community to remain silent or endure the abuse.
  - They may be strongly sanctioned by their community if they seek assistance by involving someone from the outside or the criminal justice system.
- ◇ Immigrant and refugee women:
- Are usually very financially dependent on their husbands.
    - Some immigrant and refugee women are unable to access social assistance if they left their abusive partners.
  - May fear losing their sponsorships or their refugee status.
    - The possibility of deportation causes many immigrant women to fear authority figures, including police and social workers.<sup>48</sup>
  - Immigrant and refugee women may also not report intimate partner abuse for the following reasons:<sup>49</sup>
    - They believe that an arrest is the same as a criminal record.
    - They fear that if their partner is arrested, he may be deported or have his citizenship delayed.
    - They worry about the potential impact that the criminal justice system will have on their partner's immigrant status.
    - They do not trust the criminal justice system to deliver suitable punishment.
  - Because the social services in Newfoundland and Labrador may be different than those in their country of origin, many immigrant and refugee women are not aware of the services that are currently available to them.
  - Face additional challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and racism.

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<sup>47</sup> Tutty, L. M. (2006). *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women: Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*. YWCA Canada.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

- ◇ Disabled women:
  - Are usually dependent on their families and partners for financial support, practical help, and emotional support.
  - May encounter discrimination and lack of respect for their abilities.
  
- ◇ Older women:
  - May choose to not use shelters and other services because of the following reasons:<sup>50</sup>
    - Are unaware of the community-based services that are available to them.
    - Think that shelters and other services are only intended for younger women with children.
    - Abusive relationship is further complicated by issues pertaining to aging and health.
    - Older women may hold different values from younger generations: may be more tolerant of abuse or may have been raised with different philosophies and feel that marriage vows are sacred.
    - Older women often have more attachment to home, keepsakes, photos, friends, and neighbours who have been part of their lives for many years.
    - Older women are less likely to know about others who have left abusive relationships and turned their lives around.
  - In terms of employability, older women may have insufficient exposure to technology – “computer terror”.<sup>51</sup>
  - Many senior supports, such as seniors subsidized housing, are not available to women under the age of 55.<sup>52</sup>
  - Older women whose children reach the age of majority are required to move out of “family-only” housing.
  - These women also lose access to child benefits once their children reach the age of majority.
  
- ◇ Women may not like being referred to as “victims of violence” or “survivors” due to personal reputation and privacy issues.

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<sup>50</sup> Hightower, J, Smith, MJ, and Hightower, HC. (2001). *Silent and Invisible: A Report on Abuse and Violence in the Lives of Older Women in British Columbia and Yukon*, Vancouver: BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

<sup>51</sup> *Access Diminished: A Report on Women’s Training and Employment Services in Ontario*. (June 2000). Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women, ACTEW.

<sup>52</sup> *Housing Thousands of Women: An edited collection of the works of the Women’s Housing Action Team*. (2005). University of Victoria, Faculty of Human and Social Development.

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