

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

As part of Phase II of the Framework for Action on Family Violence developed by the Coalition Against Family Violence, the GNWT, on behalf of the coalition, conducted a survey on public attitudes towards family violence through the NWT Bureau of Statistics.

The Coalition Against Family Violence is a group that includes community service organization, individuals, GNWT and Federal government departments who directly work with the effects of family violence. Their strategy to reduce family violence and its impacts on individuals, families and communities of the NWT is contained in a document called Phase II of the Framework for Action on Family Violence.

One of the mandates of the coalition is to conduct research into family violence and the effectiveness of programs, services and actions taken to deal with the issue. To know how far we have come, we need to know where we have come from. To that effect, the coalition wished to measure the attitudes of the public respecting family violence by gender and by location from a large urban centre to a small community.

The Survey was conducted between November 4th and December 2nd, 2007. A total of 753 surveys were completed, by 321 men and 432 women 19 years and older by phone or face-to-face. Phone interviews were conducted in Yellowknife, Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Smith and Norman Wells, while face-to-face interviews were conducted in all other selected communities.

The Framework for Action on Family Violence proposed that a second survey be conducted in 2011 to measure how the public attitude towards family violence has changed.

The Purpose of The Survey:

To get a baseline of attitudes and understanding of family violence in some key areas:

- If people believe it occurs and if it has affected their lives
- What actions may constitutes family violence
- Understanding knowledge of :
 - Spousal abuse
 - Dating violence



- Elder abuse
- Abuse of people with disabilities
- Children who witness violence
- What do people believe is the cause of family violence e.g. is it alcohol related, stress related.
- What do they know about the services available
- How effective is Family Violence Awareness Week

How Will The Data Be Used:

- To get a baseline of the public's understanding and attitude towards family violence in the NWT.
- To tailor public education campaigns/materials to increase knowledge and understanding about family violence.
- To measure any change in attitudes over a 5 year period in a subsequent survey.

Findings of the Survey

- 88% of respondents said they were very worried or somewhat worried about family violence in their community.
- Children were identified to be most at risk; women identified as the second most at risk.
- Most respondents strongly agree that children may have behaviour problems as a result of being exposed to family violence.
- Almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of men and $\frac{1}{4}$ of women agreed that a man has the "right" to have sex with his wife.
- Males and respondents from smaller communities were more likely to consider family violence as only physical violence and that the issue of violence between a couple was a private matter.
- The top 2 reasons respondents thought abusers do not seek help were: "denial" and "not wanting others to find out".
- The top reasons respondents thought victims do not seek help were "fear" and "not wanting others to find out".
- The most often cited reason for not getting help in smaller communities was "not knowing where to get help".

- Overall, respondents thought the single most effective way to deal with family violence was by having more serious penalties for offenders. The second most effective way was providing better treatment for offenders.

Summary:

- People in the NWT are concerned about family violence. They are particularly concerned about the effect it has on children and believe there are clear reasons why abusers or victims don't seek help.
- Respondents in the NWT have varied opinions on family violence. There were significant differences in attitudes between small and large communities. For example; attitudes and beliefs around the role of alcohol, the definition of family violence and barriers to help differ between small and large communities. Smaller communities were more likely to see family violence limited to physical violence but that alcohol treatment and counselling were the best ways to deal with the issue.
- Many respondents cited shame and fear as barriers to victims seeking help; and shame and denial as barriers for abusers seeking help.
- Of concern is that respondents from small communities cited "not knowing where to go" as a significant barrier to get help.

Conclusions:

- We can conclude that despite a general awareness and concern about family violence, fear, shame and blame continue to deter victims from seeking help. When people are ashamed or fearful, they will try to deal with the issue by themselves. This isolation keeps people at risk and research tells us that violence gets worse unless and until there is an intervention.
- There is a belief that alcohol causes family violence. This attitude is more prevalent in smaller communities and likely reflects the reality that alcohol abuse exacerbates the anger that contributes to violence.
- There is hope that parenting and counselling programs can aid in reducing family violence. The lack of parenting skills often arises in discussions between Residential School Survivors.
- There continues to be an attitude that "real family violence" is limited to physical assaults but we know from research that continual emotional assaults can be more devastating to the long term well-being of victims than physical assaults by breaking down the victim's sense of self worth and destroying the instincts required to protect herself and children.

- While many surveyed thought heavier penalties will serve as a deterrent, police involvement was not seen to decrease the violence according to half of the responses.
- Respondents indicate a factor against seeking help is the worry of “what will happen to the children”? Staying in a violent relationship exposes them to physical and psychological harm. Leaving requires resources, such as an affordable home and money, without which, the family faces homelessness and poverty. Women face a gamble on the future of their children either way.

Acknowledgements:

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