

POLICIES MATTER:

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH REFLECTION, KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION



SUMMARY REPORT #1: POLICY ANALYSIS

This is the first in a series of summary reports for the Policies Matter Project. This report is intended to share project findings and to support other organizations to carry out gender informed policy work. For more information please visit www.policiesmatter.ca or contact us at womanact@womanabuse.ca.

What Did We Do

- We carried out a gender-based analysis of the impact of policy and systems on women's safety, with an emphasis on immigrant and refugee women living in Toronto
- Collected, summarized and analyzed federal, provincial and municipal legislation and policy
- Created an annotated bibliography of the literature that provides a analysis of policy as it impacts women experiencing violence
- Carried out focus groups and interviews with service providers, women with lived experience and decision makers to validate the findings from the literature review with real life experiences

Gender Based Analysis

Gender-based analysis is a process that examines the differences in women's and men's lives, and identifies the potential impact of policies and programs in relation to these differences. The project applied a gender-based analysis to its activities to produce gender-based information about the impact of policies and programs on women who experience violence.

Safety

The project contributes to violence against women by identifying indicators and/or dimensions that contribute to women's health, wellbeing and safety:

- Income security/employment
- Safe and affordable housing/shelter:
- Freedom from racism, discrimination, persecution and criminalization
- Access to and custody of children
- Access to supports and services (e.g., legal representation)

Policy Intersections and Impacts

Through gender-based analysis we identified how policies create barriers to the determinants of safety for women:

- Policies are developed in silos and according to a narrow framework that does not take into account the complexity of women's lives or their environment
- Policies often "bump up" against each other to create conflicting policy responses that operationally negatively impact women and perpetuate unsafe situations
- Policy and programs are not consistently implemented and/or appropriately resourced; therefore, women's journeys to safety vary considerably
- There is a lack of coordination at the service delivery level that mirrors policy silos and further impacts women's ability to achieve safety
- The quality of services a woman receives is often dependent on her individual service provider
- The lack of training for service providers and the lack of practice standards means that services vary from organization to organization and from provider to provider

Consultations

The consultations validated the findings from the literature review and identified three priority areas for action for addressing policy impacts:

- Improve access to services and improve system navigation for women
- Promote the consistent delivery of services to women by enhancing the knowledge and skills of service providers
- Reduce silos that result in policies and practices that continue to disadvantage women

Policies Matter was carried out by Woman ACT, the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic and Elizabeth Fry Toronto and was funded by Status of Women Canada

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SUMMARY REPORT #2: MOVING TO ACTION

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What Did We Do

- Documented projects that address policy impacts which are being undertaken in Toronto
- Initiated two collaborative pilot projects
- Hosted a community forum to engage stakeholders in developing collaborative action plans for moving forward in priority policy impact areas

Collaborative Pilot Projects

As the project unfolded, and as the project partners continued to deepen their working relationship, ideas for projects that could address key policy impacts emerged. Each was initiated during the project and will extend the project impact well into the future.

Project #1: Coordinated Service Access

- To provide crisis/emergency counseling, support, information and referral services to women when they are required
- To improve service pathways for women who need crisis/emergency counseling, support, information and referral services

Project #2: Supporting Refugee Women in Detention

- To provide legal information and counseling support to women who are in detention

Advocacy

The project found that the capacity of service providers and advocates to address systemic policy impacts is challenging. While there are often resources for research, service redesign, service delivery and service provider training, advocacy work focussed on policies that impact the determinants of safety for women (e.g., income security, affordable housing) has been and continues to be under-resourced and inconsistently supported by funders and decision makers. This project consolidates in one place information about initiatives undertaken by violence against women organizations and allies to counter the negative impact of policy and negative policy intersections on women.

Community Forum

On May 16, 2013, the Project hosted a Community Forum which brought together more than 50 representatives from diverse organizations that address violence against women. The objectives for the day:

- Share information about the Policies Matter Project
- Learn about community initiatives that are addressing policy impacts
- Collectively identify policy priorities
- Collaboratively develop action plans to improve safety for women

The Forum featured a panel discussion which highlighted advocacy initiatives currently underway to address some of the key policy issues/determinants of safety impacting women in Toronto. The Forum culminated with participants collaboratively identifying and developing action plans for moving forward in each of the following areas:

- Poverty reduction
- Affordable housing
- Access to services

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SUMMARY REPORT #3: THE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

This is the third in a series of summary reports for the Policies Matter Project. This report is intended to share project findings and to support other organizations to carry out gender informed policy work. For more information please visit www.policiesmatter.ca or contact us at womanact@womanabuse.ca.

What Did We Do

Designed a web based tool that consolidates in one place information about policies, policy impacts and public policy initiatives being undertaken to improve safety for women who experience violence.

Blueprint for Action

The Policies Matter Project resulted in the development of the Blueprint for Action - a web based tool designed with the following objectives in mind:

- To recognize the initiatives already underway and working to address policy impacts
- To provide a repository for documentation regarding policy and violence against women
- To create a living document that illustrates, over time, what is being done by different players, tables and/or sectors to address violence against women policy issues
- To facilitate collaborative long term advocacy or policy reform strategies among diverse violence against women allies
- To provide examples for practical improvements at the service delivery level, including service delivery process redesign or service provider training
- To enhance communication and collaboration among violence against women allies

Community Feedback:

Initial feedback to the web based tool was highly positive. Stakeholders expressed a strong interest in using the tool to communicate in visual and compelling terms the complex and often harmful impact of policy intersection on women to funders and decision makers.

Next Steps

The web based tool will be housed at the Woman ACT website. The project partners are in the process of developing a governance structure for the Blueprint for Action to ensure its long term viability as a repository of information and catalyst for action regarding violence against women policy matters.

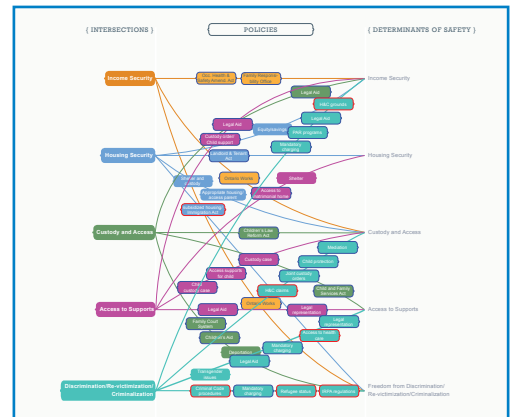
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SUMMARY REPORT #4: EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

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What Did We Do

- Developed a clear theory of change, logic model and outcomes to provide a clear picture of what the project was aiming to achieve
- Analyzed information collected through numerous evaluation activities to document the degree to which the project succeeded in achieving its aims and develop recommendations for next steps

Evaluation Findings

This Project has made a remarkable contribution to violence against women work as highlighted by the following critical success factors and outcomes:

- A strong commitment from a core group of leaders
- A new and innovative web based tool, the Blueprint Tool, for visualizing the diversity of conflicting policy and legislation that impact the lived experience of women and service providers
- New opportunities for communication of, and collaborative advocacy about, policy issues that negatively impact women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing violence.
- A process that achieved significant consultation, consensus-building and learning interactions across diverse sectors of service delivery

Next Steps

As the only organization in Toronto with an exclusive mandate to address policy issues regarding violence against women, WomanACT is uniquely positioned to facilitate communication and collaborative action on policy issues that impact women who experience violence. The project recommendations will be reviewed at WomanACT's upcoming strategic planning process and will help to shape WomanACT's work over the next three years. Immediate next steps include:

- Develop and implement a communications plan to ensure that project findings and materials are disseminated to facilitate the continued efforts of policy makers and service providers to address the negative impact of policies on women who experience violence
- Launch the web based tool and develop governance structures and a resource development plan to ensure the long term sustainability of the tool
- Reengage with stakeholders to review and operationalize the Action Plan
- Bring together a broader set of stakeholders to define opportunities for strategic public policy action

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