

Consultations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the
Status of Women

Study on Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada

Brief submitted by the

**Regroupement québécois des
Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel
(RQCALACS)**

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Introduction: Reform is needed to protect women

According to the most recent Statistics Canada study on criminal victimization in Canada, only 29% of Canadians tend to report victimization to the police.¹ This drops to 6% when the crime in question is sexual violence.² Combined with the long-standing finding that women are significantly more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault, the social context of women living in Canada underscores the urgent need for reform in order to finally provide them with a safe society where they will be protected from the additional vulnerabilities they face because of their gender.

The Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel (RQCALACS) is an organization representing 26 sexual assault centres (CALACS) throughout Quebec. Since its creation in 1979, its mission has been to develop tools and conduct research related to (1) support for women victims of sexual violence and their relatives and close friends; (2) prevention and training for staff; and (3) advocacy and coordination among the various sectors to eliminate all forms of sexual violence. We are submitting this brief with the objective of reiterating and reaffirming the need to invest more in developing initiatives to prevent sexual violence against women and to finally provide them with a justice system tailored to their specific situation and needs.

Barriers to reporting sexual violence

Sexual violence and partner violence are closely related. The idea that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by strangers late at night is a myth and, in fact, studies³ prove that, in most cases, sexual assaults occur in private homes, within the family unit, in romantic relationships or with former intimate partners. In order to stop this trend and the violence, it is important to send a clear message across the country that if women decide to report victimization and break their silence, they will be heard and will at least have the opportunity to be treated without bias or judgment at the police station and will be defended and protected by the Crown—rights that are far from guaranteed in Canada. We also note an overestimation of the risk of false accusations which, in other types of crimes, does not affect each victim's experience in the judicial system.

Another barrier to reporting that our Quebec practice identifies and that needs to be addressed is related to the parameters for reporting sexual violence to the police in the case of women victims who have a precarious immigration status, such as those who are being sponsored by their spouse. These victims, who are experiencing additional vulnerability, tend to fear that the police will check their immigration status and report them if they go to a police station to report the violence they are experiencing at home. We note, in Quebec at least, a disturbing failure to observe the ban against police investigating the immigration status of women who come forward to report violence against them. However, all women should have the right to be protected against sexual violence, regardless of their immigration status or any other identity factor.

¹ Statistics Canada (2019), *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2019*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00014-eng.htm>.

² Ibid.

³ Statistics Canada (2018), *Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54979-eng.htm>.

Recommendations: Prevention and awareness among young people

- That the Government of Canada invest more resources in the creation and dissemination of tools to prevent violence against women
- That young high school students and the school staff who work with them be included as a target audience for sexual violence prevention efforts
- That high schools offer a program similar to the Empreinte⁴ program, which is currently taught in some Quebec high schools. The program provides
 - in-class workshops tackling themes such as the importance of free and informed consent;
 - school staff training that addresses myths and misconceptions; and
 - coaching and educational material and tools for parents.

REGROUPEMENT QUÉBÉCOIS DES CALACS

PO Box Garnier 83626

Montreal, Quebec H2J 4E9

514-529-5252

Toll-free: 1-877-717-5252

Fax: 514-529-5255

info@rqcalacs.qc.ca

⁴ Empreinte – *Agir ensemble contre les agressions à caractère sexuel*, <http://www.programmeempreinte.com/>.