



Teacher's Kit

Part Two: Teacher's Backgrounder



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I. Gender Equality

Important Definitions

Sex: Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that differentiate males and females.

Gender: Unlike sex, which refers to an individual's biological and physiological characteristics, gender is a socially constructed phenomenon. The term gender refers to a set of socially accepted qualities and behaviours that are attributed to males and females based on their biological characteristics. Gender roles are learned and can be affected by factors such as education, culture and economics. Gender roles are socially determined and can thus, evolve overtime.

It is important to note that much of the time, gender identities cannot be categorized into 'man' and 'woman'. In examining transgender identities, we can see that an individual with the biological and physiological characteristics of a male does not necessarily identify with the gender typically assigned to males; likewise an individual with the biological and physiological characteristics of a female does not necessarily identify with the gender typically assigned to females. Furthermore, intersex people – individuals born with both male and female organs – remind us that the 'biological' and 'physiological' traits associated with males and females might not be as distinct as we think.

Gender Equality: Principles of gender equality are centered on the belief that women and men are equal. Gender equality involves: promoting the full participation of women as equal partners in sustainable social development; encouraging the equal participation of women and men in all decision-making capacities; supporting women and girls so that they are fully able to exercise their rights to life, liberty, security of person, education, healthcare etc; and reducing the gap between women's and men's access to and control of resources. Gender equality can only be achieved when women are recognized as agents of change in all economic, social and political processes.

Gender Equity: Gender equity not only demands a substantive change in the policies and attitudes that govern gender roles and identities but also requires that an increased commitment be made to ensure that equal opportunity is accompanied by equal access.



Gender Equality in Canada

The dramatic improvement of principles of gender equality and gender equity in Canada over the past few decades, has contributed to an increase in both the formal and substantive equality enjoyed by Canadian women. Canada is not only a signatory to numerous international agreements and conventions, which cite gender equality as a necessary requisite for progress, but also declares fundamental equality for all within its own *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Nevertheless, thousands of Canadian women still cannot exercise their fundamental economic, political and social rights. In fact, the gender gap in Canada is much wider than commonly believed.

This inequality is perhaps most obvious in the economic spheres of Canadian society. Dr. Karen Hadley, author of *“And We Still Ain’t Satisfied” Gender Inequality in Canada: A Status Report for 2001*, approximates that Canadian women are earning 61 percent of what Canadian men are earning. Dr. Hadley reports that Canadian women are still denied access to many of the Canada’s high paying professional jobs. Furthermore, Canadian women are far more susceptible to poverty than men. In Canada, approximately 20 percent of Canadian women are living in poverty. Those numbers are high for women of colour (37 percent of whom are living in poverty) and Aboriginal women (43 percent of whom are living in poverty).¹

Deconstructing Gender Roles

Globally, women continue to enjoy fewer rights than men and thus, women remain most vulnerable to the social, political and economic repercussions (including poverty and sexual and physical violence) of change, conflict and globalization. Not only are men and boys seemingly entitled to more legal protections than women and girls, but women and girls also experience limited access to education, healthcare, community and social resources, job markets, income and capital and information and knowledge. Although, women play critical roles in food production, income generation, resource management, community organization, reproductive labour and domestic and familial duties, women’s societal contributions often go unnoticed.

Some of the **prevailing attitudes associated with women** in contemporary society are:

- women are feminine
- women are the primary caregivers
- a woman’s career should come second to her familial obligations
- women are often less intelligent and less educated than men, women should therefore earn less than men
- women are physically weaker than men
- women are more emotional than men
- women are inferior to men
- women should be innocent and chaste but submissive to men’s sexual desires
- women are passive
- it is okay objectify women
- women should not have control over their reproductive capacities
- women should be heterosexual

¹ Hadley, Karen Dr. “And We Still Ain’t Satisfied,” *Gender Inequality in Canada: A Status Report for 2001*. Released by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the CSJ Foundation. 2001.



Some of the **prevailing attitudes associated with men** in contemporary society are:

- men are masculine
- men are the primary breadwinners and are not responsible for childcare
- men should focus on their careers rather than their familial obligations
- men are more capable than women
- men are physically stronger than women
- men should not show emotion
- men are superior to women
- men who are promiscuous are more masculine
- men are more aggressive than women
- men should be heterosexual

II. Key Issues Relating to VAW

Violence against Women

Definition: The globally accepted definition of violence against women is any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts and coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or in private life.

This includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, harassment or intimidation; sexual abuse or rape, including marital rape; battery; domestic violence; forced prostitution; trafficking in women and girls; burning or acid throwing; female genital mutilation; female feticide and infanticide; violence in armed conflict; systemic rape; sexual slavery; forced pregnancy; and forced marriage.²

Effects of Violence against Women

Violence against women is not only a violation of fundamental human rights but it is also an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. Globally, violence against women has eroded women's rights to life, health, security, autonomy, bodily integrity and political participation.

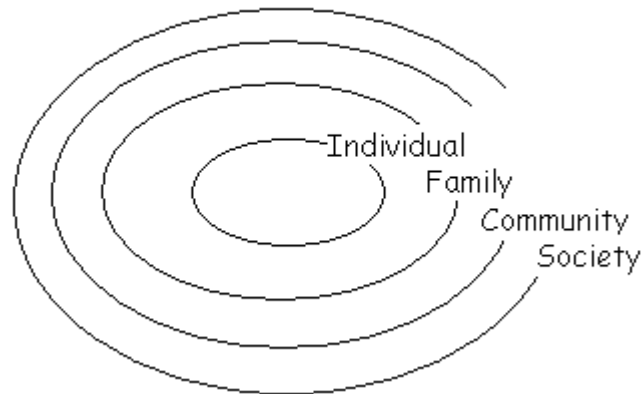
Violence against women carries serious consequences for both women's physical and psychological health; these consequences extend beyond any immediate physical damage. Women who have experienced violence are susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms and suicide. Women who have experienced sexual violence have often experienced early sexual initiation and are increasingly vulnerable to unprotected sex, unplanned pregnancies and the contraction of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Women who have experienced violence may also suffer from social isolation and rejection, lowered self-esteem and economic dependence.

² Beijing Platform for Action - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>

Children who experience violence or witness marital violence within the home have a higher propensity to become violent with others or suffer from violence themselves. Children experiencing domestic or family violence might also suffer from: emotional trauma, difficulties in school, lack of concentration, social isolation, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence and unstable living conditions.

Violence against women has enormous social, economic and political repercussions for society at large. Violence against women undermines a society's social framework for development, justice, peace and equality. The economic costs associated with violence against women are high, included in these costs are: health care, policing, incarceration, intervention, transition houses, diminished productive capacities, social services, child services, court proceedings and intergenerational effects.

Who does violence against women effect?



Violence against women endangers the health and violates the rights of millions of women and girls around the world, regardless of race, socio-economic status, religion or ethnicity.

Some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to violence, including:

- women belonging to minority or indigenous groups
- refugees
- migrant labourers
- women living in poverty
- women living in rural or remote communities
- women placed in federal institutions or in detention centres
- displaced persons
- women who have been repatriated
- women living in situations of armed conflict and wars of aggression
- women living in areas, in which civil conflict and terrorism are present
- female children
- elderly women



Where does violence against women happen?

Violence against women persists globally as both a pervasive violation of human rights and a significant impediment to achieving gender equality. It is estimated that one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by a male in her lifetime. Despite successful actions by women's organizations over the past three decades, the scale and severity of violence against women is increasing.

Don't State Laws and International Agreements Protect Women?

While there are several law and international agreements that were developed to protect fundamental human rights, including women's rights, it is often difficult to enforce these agreements. State interventions to protect women through effective implementation of legislation have consistently been hindered by the lack of support from dominant public and community interests. When communities act to legitimize violence against women as 'normal', state interventions have limited success.

One of the most important international conventions protecting women is ***The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW)***. It was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and is often considered to be the international bill of rights for women. As signatories to the Convention, States commit to: incorporate a principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination and to ensure the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

How is the Approach to Ending Violence against Women Changing?

In the past violence against women has been considered a private matter, not a public issue. As a result, violence against women has been extremely difficult to document and even more difficult to fight. However, in recent years the issue of violence against women has received more attention than ever before, both within Canada and internationally. Violence against women is finally being recognized as both a health and human rights issue. In recent years, thousands of non-governmental organizations, including women's groups, international development agencies and community services societies have been created to offer support and services to women who have experienced violence. These organizations aim to equip and empower women with the means to effectively fight violence against women. Structural gender inequalities are not only being recognized as harmful for women; but are also being seen as a detriment to both community and societal development.

The discussion and language surrounding issues of violence against women is changing as well. Women who have experienced violence are not only being regarded as victims, but are finally being recognized as **agents of change**. Initiatives committed to ending violence against women recognize women as powerful assets in instigating change and challenging widespread gender inequalities. Furthermore, men and boys are becoming increasingly involved in the fight to end violence against women. Men are being encouraged to view themselves as individual human beings and not just as representatives of masculine culture.



What Gains Have Been Made?

Nearly three decades of persistent work by women's organizations, international development agencies and community service societies has resulted in increased awareness of and concern for violence against women. Dedicated organizations have highlighted the widespread nature of violence, publicized women's suffering, analyzed its causes and prompted international bodies and national governments to action. The development of various international agreements have enabled signatory states to implement legal measures and services to combat violence against women and offer support to women impacted by violence; by the year 2000, 118 countries had developed national action plans to end violence against women. Additionally, several crucial international and regional coalitions have emerged to address the issue of violence against women from a multidimensional and comprehensive position.

Although changes in the conceptualization of violence against women and the creation and implementation of international agreements which act to legally protect women from violence are important first steps in ending all violence against women, activists confirm that the situation is worsening. The prevalence of violence against women is increasing and thus, it is necessary that this issue be made a public priority. Individuals, communities, states and international bodies must work together to bring about change in attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and perceptions.

Key Challenges to Ending Violence against Women

The core challenges for all those working in the area of violence against women are to:

- to challenge and change existing societal and individual attitudes that accept violence against women as 'normal';
- to mobilize all sections of the family, community and society to act and prevent violence against women;
- to build popular pressure to implement equitable policies and to help to sustain the political will to achieve them;
- to bring together diverse local, national, regional and international efforts to end violence against women.



III. Grouping Connections

Why does Violence against Women Happen?

Violence against women can be attributed to a wider variety of socio-cultural factors, including:

- Historically unequal power relations between men and women
- Differentiated socialization of girls and boys
- Women's unequal access to political, economic and legal sectors
- The use of violent means to solve interpersonal conflict
- Unequal symbolizations of women's and men's bodies

Although acts of violence against women are often perpetrated by individuals, it is important to consider that gender-based violence is a learned behaviour. Socialization plays a major role in such learning. Individual acts are supported overtly or tacitly through social institutions such as the family, the community or the state, either through normative rules or by impunity towards acts of violent domination.

Does violence against women occur at every level of society?

Violence against women is institutionalized at all levels of society – individual, family, community and institutional. To foster women's equal worth and opportunity, it is necessary to address the issue of gender discrimination and violence at each level of society.

Solutions to end violence must begin with the individual and extend to the family, the community and society in general.

Listed below are some of the factors that can contribute to an increased prevalence in violence against women at different levels of society.

Individual Level: Research indicates that individuals that experience violence or abuse as a child or witness marital violence in the home are more likely to perpetrate or suffer from partner violence. Frequent use of drugs or alcohol can also lead to an increased prevalence of violence against women.

Family and Relationship Level: Cross-cultural studies have cited male control of wealth, male decision-making within the home and marital violence as strong predictors and indicators of violence against women.

Community Level: Women's isolation and lack of social support, together with male peer groups that condone and legitimize men's violence, predict higher rates of violence against women

State Level: Studies have found that inadequate legislations and policies to prevent and punish acts of violence as well as low levels of sensitivity and awareness among law enforcement agencies and social services, are linked to a higher incidence of violence.

Institutional Level: Studies conducted globally have found that violence against women is most common where gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced, and where the concept of masculinity is linked to toughness, male honour and dominance.



IV. Making Connections

Gender Inequality and Violence

The issues of gender inequality and violence against women are fundamentally interconnected. Gender inequality remains one of the root causes of violence against women while violence against women serves as both an acute manifestation of gender inequality and a means of perpetuating it.³ Gender discrimination and inequality, which is rooted in the socially constructed gender roles and identities assigned to women and men, denies women access to critical resources⁴, including education, employment, capital and information and knowledge. Without access to these social resources, women's power to make decisions, earn a living and free themselves from situations of violence and domination is seriously compromised. Ending violence against women is central to the promotion of gender equality; at the same time, achieving gender equality is crucial to the elimination of violence against women.

V. 'We Can' Campaign

Untangling Change

What Kind of Change is Necessary?

The model of change the campaign seeks to support is one of awareness, reflection, networking and action. This is not a linear process; the progression of awareness and the understanding and readiness for action take time, repeated exposure to ideas, demonstration and peer challenging and support. Change Makers are the key players in raising awareness, breaking the silence and inspiring and demanding change.

- ❖ Ending violence against women requires a change in the deeply entrenched and pervasive societal attitudes and practice that support and perpetuate violence against women.

What Kind of Change is Possible?

'We Can' believes that every individual has the power to change her or his own life as well as the lives of those around them; however, 'We Can' recognizes that change is a social process and operates on the premise that people change through choice and opportunity.

- ❖ Long standing practices that are harmful to women can be replaced with positive social values that foster women's individual rights and dignity.

How can change be achieved?

People need to feel the need for change, see its benefits and initiate the process by raising awareness, breaking the silence and rejecting the ideas and beliefs that support violence against women.

- ❖ There has to be a trigger for new consciousness in societal attitudes and community involvement.

³ World Health Organization. 'Addressing Violence against Women and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals.' *Department of Gender, Women and Health Family and Community Health* (2005) <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSSept05.pdf>

⁴ UNICEF. 'Gender Equality.' <http://www.unicef.org/gender/index.html>



'We Can' Campaign

What is the 'We Can' Campaign?

The 'We Can End All Violence against Women' campaign is a multi-year, international initiative, which seeks to challenge and change the societal attitudes, beliefs and practices that support and maintain violence against women.

In 2004, the campaign was launched in six South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since then the campaign has spread to other parts of Asia, as well as across Africa, Europe, North and Latin Americas.

The British Columbia 'We Can' was officially launched in June 2007 pioneering the campaign outside South Asia. The British Columbia campaign is comprised of a number of organizations, which include women's organizations/collectives, community service societies, unions, educational/training organizations, international development agencies and media supporters.⁵

Campaign Objectives

'We Can' seeks to promote and encourage:

- an environment in which violence against women is never acceptable
- a collective and visible stand against violence against women
- a popular movement to end all violence against women
- and a cooperative network between local, provincial and regional alliances working to end violence against women

Campaign Strategy

The British Columbia 'We Can' campaign believes that violence against women is rooted in structural inequalities and widespread misconceptions of gender roles and identities. 'We Can' aims to fight violence against women by changing individuals' attitudes towards women. 'We Can' works with men and women to re-evaluate and re-define concepts of gender and identity, and to break down structural gender inequalities.

'We Can' believes that every individual has the power to change her or his own life as well as the lives of those around them; however, 'We Can' recognizes that people need to feel the need for change and understand the benefits of change before real change can occur.

A key element of the 'We Can' campaign model is educating and mobilizing individuals to take a public stand and public action against violence against women. This is achieved by inviting ordinary women, men and children to become 'Change Makers'.

⁵ Visit <http://www.wecanbc.ca> for the full list of current members of 'We Can' coalition.



Attitudes

'We Can' believes that there is a strong correlation between violence against women and a lack of equality in the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres of society. This inequality stems from misconceptions regarding women's abilities and capacities as well as from the lack of recognition regarding women's contributions to society. 'We Can' believes that by changing the attitudes that support and maintain violence against women, women's social, economic and political contributions will be recognized and women's equality will improve.

Who is a Change Maker?

A Change Maker is an individual who pledges not to commit or tolerate any violence against women, who works to re-evaluate his/her own attitudes and who agrees to encourage at least five other people to do the same.

In communicating and discussing violence against women with others, each Change Maker secures support for her or his own change. As circles of influence begin to overlap and the number of Change Makers within a given group or geographical location attains a critical mass, an environment is created in which women experiencing violence or individuals wishing to speak out against violence will receive both support and encouragement.

Change Makers Believe:

- ❖ Violence against women is never acceptable
- ❖ Change in current gender perceptions and attitudes is essential and possible
- ❖ Violence against women is a public issue, not a private matter
- ❖ Each individual has the potential to change her or his own life
- ❖ Change must begin now

What Do Change Makers Do?

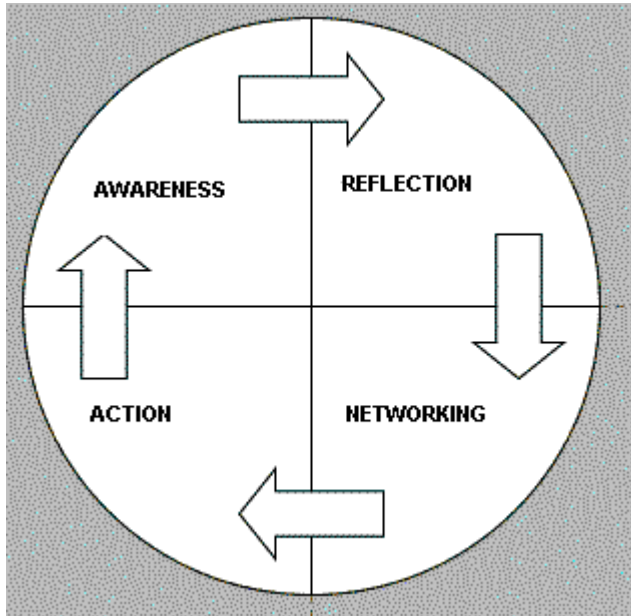
- ❖ Initiate and encourage discussion about gender inequality and violence against women
- ❖ Act as role models of alternative behaviours
- ❖ Encourage others to recognize the various forms of gender violence and discrimination
- ❖ Enlist the help of influential community members to create a positive environment and to reduce risks for women

How Can They Do This?

- ❖ Talk to friends, neighbours and colleagues to raise awareness about violence against women and encourage them to re-examine their own attitudes and practices
- ❖ Increase their own awareness about violence against women
- ❖ Disseminate campaign information
- ❖ Challenge existing gender biased attitudes, stereotypes and practices
- ❖ Take a public stand against violence against women
- ❖ Support women who are experiencing violence

Model of Change

The model of change this campaign seeks to support is one of **awareness, reflection, action and change**.



This is not a linear process; the progression of awareness and the understanding and readiness for action take time, repeated exposure to ideas, demonstration and peer challenging and support.

Change Makers are the key players in raising awareness, breaking the silence and inspiring and demanding change.

Together, WE CAN end all violence against women!



Resources

- The British Columbia 'We Can' Website: www.wecanbc.ca
- The South Asia/International 'We Can' Website: www.wecanendvaw.org
- The United Nations 4th World Conference on Women:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>
- Status of Women Canada: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/>
- Women's Organizations in British Columbia:
<http://www.distel.ca/womlist/countries/canada/britishcolumbia.html>

Supporting Victims of Violence

- VictimLINK: 1 800-563-0808 (Toll free 24/7 helpline for victims of family and sexual violence)
- Youth Against Violence Line: 1 800 680-4264 (Toll free 24/7 helpline for youth)
- List of BC Transition Houses: <http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/women/contacts/th.htm>
- VictimsINFO: <http://victimsinfo.ca> (For victims and witnesses of crime in BC)

Legal Tools

- Legal Aid: <http://www.lss.bc.ca>
- Guide to BC Court System: <http://www.courtsofbc.ca>
- Family Law: <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca>
- Legal Resources Database: <http://www.clicklaw.bc.ca>