



The Sexual Assault
Support Centre of Ottawa



STATEMENT ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE & POLICE BRUATILITY IN CASE OF ABDIRAHMAN ABDI

The Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa and the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women are organizations that have worked for decades on the front lines with women who experience violence in Ottawa. We work towards the eradication of violence against women and gender-based violence with an anti-racist and anti-oppressive inclusive framework. We want to emphasize the connections between state violence and interpersonal violence - connections that need to be discussed in light of the unjust death of Abdirahman Abdi. We urgently call for attention to his death. It highlights that law enforcement responses are problematic towards communities of colour, and people with mental health or ability challenges. We need to do this in combination with calling attention to inadequate criminal justice system responses towards survivors of sexual violence. These two types of violence can not be separated.

We know that survivors of sexual violence often encounter insurmountable barriers in seeking accountability in the criminal justice system. It has been well documented that less than 10% of survivors of sexual violence will report their experience to police, and that only fraction of these result in a conviction. [1] As front-line advocates, we often hear from survivors that their voices and opinions are not taken into account when reporting experiences of sexual violence. That they become a third party witness to the violence they were subjected to. We want to acknowledge the flaws within the criminal justice system and police practices that fail survivors and members of the community. That is why we are critical of the police responses that resulted in Abdirahman Abdi's death.

Historically, sexual violence has been used to defend racist actions—we have witnessed the vilification of indigenous, black and other communities of colour as more likely to be perpetrators of violence than their white counterparts. The recent report by the Ontario Ombudsman, released in June 2016, also points to the all too frequent deadly response that people with mental health and mental ability issues face when confronted by police. As a result, there is often a hesitancy within communities of colour to rely on policing and the criminal justice system for safety and accountability in situations of violence against women and gender-based violence. At the same time that these communities are over-policed, they are also more vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence. Transwomen of colour, women with disabilities, indigenous women and women of colour are at a higher risk of violence. The struggle to end gender-based violence and violence against women is not in opposition to the struggle to end racism and police brutality. Indeed, combatting racist violence is essential to building safer societies for all of us and to adequately supporting survivors. As anti-violence organizations, and members of the broader Ottawa community it is our responsibility to centre and prioritize the needs of these vulnerable communities.

Better supports and responses were needed for those who called the police to Bridgehead and for Abdirahman Abdi. There needs to be resources and services separate from the police that people can turn to and that will not result in the escalation of violence. Survivors shouldn't have to worry that reporting sexual violence will result in more violence. Racialized communities and people dealing with mental health issues shouldn't have to worry that their interactions with police will result in death.

We strongly support the recommendations that have been put forth by organizations here today calling for accountability and stand in solidarity with all those affected by violence. As anti-violence advocates, we are calling for police responses and accountability frameworks to address sexual violence within a broader context of anti-black racism and systemic violence experienced within our communities. This also needs to take into account the experience of those with mental health or ability challenges. We want a criminal justice system that recognizes and validates the experiences of survivors of sexual violence without perpetuating violence.

At SASC Ottawa we offer peer support counselling to survivors of sexual violence, if you are looking for support you can contact our office at 613-725-2160 ext 227 or call our support line 613-234-2266.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us,

In Solidarity,

Yamikani Msosa

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[1] Limits of Criminal Justice Response: Trends in Police and Court Processing of Sexual Violence, Johnson 2012