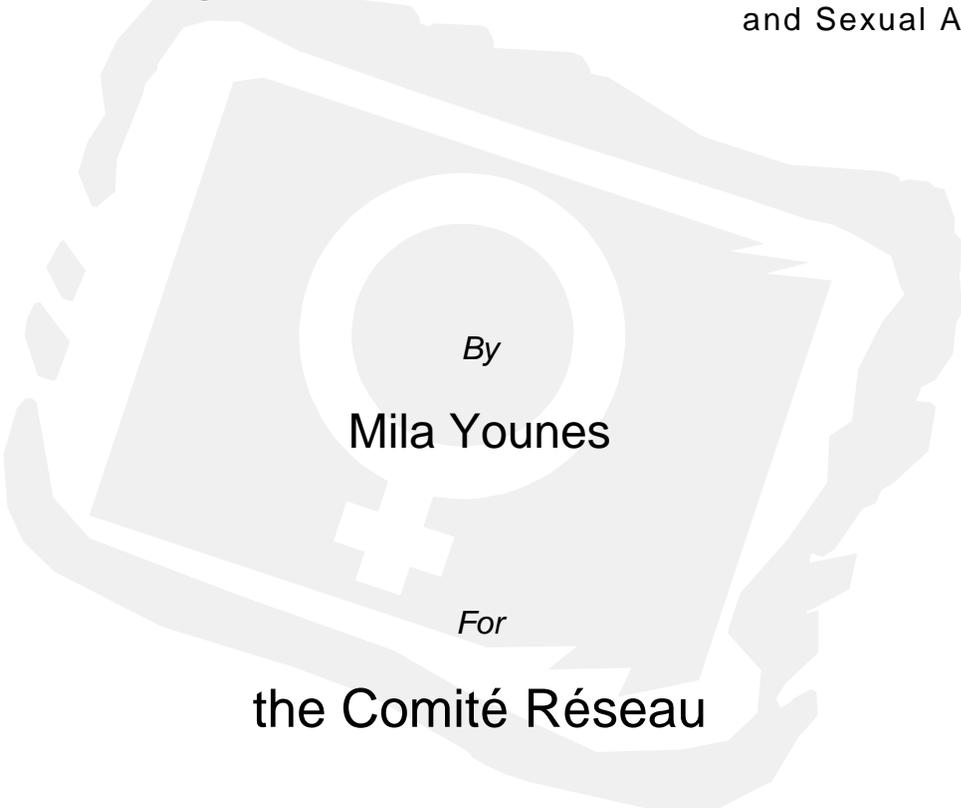


---

# Accessibility of French Language Services

in the Ottawa Region for Francophone Women and French-Speaking  
Immigrant Women Who are Victims of Domestic Violence  
and Sexual Assault



*By*

Mila Younes

*For*

the Comité Réseau

*February 2004*

---

# Acknowledgements

The Comité Réseau wishes to thank each person who collaborated in any way in this action-research project, whether through her or his testimony, participation or comments at various stages of the process through to the completion of this report.

We especially wish to highlight the courage and strength of the sexual assault and domestic violence survivors who, despite all the hurdles they face, continue to work toward a safe non-violent existence. Their contribution was invaluable, both in identifying barriers to the accessibility of French language services and consequently in proposing ways to remedy the situation.

We also wish to thank the project steering committee for their on-going support: Madeleine Dagenais, Joanne Hart, Maisie Ismail, Nicole Poliquin and Ghislaine Sirois.

In addition, we wish to thank Status of Women Canada, Women's Program for their financial support for the research and publication of this document. The opinions expressed here are those of the Comité Réseau and do not necessarily represent the opinions or viewpoints of Status of Women Canada.

*Editing:* Louise Allaire, Madeleine Dagenais

*Layout:* Denise Pratte

*English Translation:* Maureen Aubin

This document is also available in French and on the Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF) website at [www.francofemmes.org/aocvf/](http://www.francofemmes.org/aocvf/) under *Publications*.

N.B. unless otherwise indicated all quotations are translations from the original French.

# History *of French Language Services in Ontario for Addressing Violence against Women*

Services for addressing violence against women have existed in Ontario for about 30 years. It was in fact during the 1970's that women's shelters began to offer services for women who were victims of violence and that the first rape crisis centres opened their doors. Shelter services became available for Francophone women when Maison d'amitié opened in Ottawa 26 years ago, Maison Interlude in Hawkesbury in 1984 and Maison Interlude of Kapuskasing. French language shelter services are also offered in Sturgeon Falls and in Matheson. In 1993, the Ontario government financed the establishment in eleven localities of French language services for addressing sexual assault and these services still operate in Ottawa, Sudbury, Toronto, Hamilton-Niagara and Cornwall. A few services are offered in Windsor, North Bay, Simcoe and services are being developed in Chatham-Kent. Francophone women can access certain services in family service centers, community resource centres, community health centres and other related agencies.

In 1997, the Ontario government improved access to French language services that address domestic violence by the creation of programs in Sudbury, Toronto and Thunder Bay. Limited programming for French-speaking immigrant women was also provided.

Francophone women can without much difficulty access French language services in Eastern Ontario, in the Ottawa region and certain Northern centres, as long as they do not expect the same range of services as that offered in English. For someone who speaks French in the counties of Prescott-Russell there is still no sexual assault centre and the only available services for sexual assault are offered by one support worker in a mental health centre...In Sudbury, a Francophone woman can obtain services at the Centre Victoria pour femmes (CVF), but services at the shelter are sporadic. In the Northwest, French language services are offered by the Centre des femmes francophones (CFFNOO) in Thunder Bay, Geraldton and Marathon; their funding however remains uncertain. In almost all rural areas, they are non-existent. In the South, there are as yet no French language women's shelters for French-speaking women. In Cornwall, the Sexual Assault Support Services of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry & Akwesasne (SASS) offer a crisis line, but no support groups or individual counselling. Much remains to be done regarding French language services across the province...In addition to insufficient direct services for dealing with violence against women, there are also French language legal aid inadequacies, difficulties obtaining service in French from social assistance, from the police, from the Children's Aid Society and in the courts. A losing combination for Francophone women who experience violence...

In this report, we will examine the accessibility of French language services in Ottawa for women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

# Table of Contents

---

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	<b>Context</b> .....	<b>2</b>
1.2	<b>Project Objectives</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.3	<b>Report Structure</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1	<b>Scope of the Survey</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.2	<b>Method</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.3	<b>Participation</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.4	<b>Ratification Meeting</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>RESULTS : ASSESSMENT OF DEFICIENCIES</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1	<b>Francophone Clientele Who Are Victims of Violence</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	<b>12</b>
3.1.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	<b>19</b>
3.2	<b>Francophone Clientele Who Are Survivors of Incest or Sexual Assault</b> .....	<b>20</b>
3.2.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	<b>20</b>
3.2.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	<b>20</b>
3.2.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	<b>22</b>

<b>3.3</b>	<b>French-Speaking Immigrant Women Clientele</b> .....	24
3.3.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	24
3.3.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	25
3.3.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	30
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Marginalized Women Clientele</b> .....	30
3.4.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	30
3.4.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	31
3.4.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	31
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Francophone Support Workers</b> .....	32
3.5.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	32
3.5.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	32
3.5.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	42
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Anglophone Support Workers</b> .....	44
3.6.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	44
3.6.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	45
3.6.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	51
<b>3.7</b>	<b>Francophone Agency Directors</b> .....	52
3.7.1	<i>General Observations</i> .....	52
3.7.2	<i>Obstacles</i> .....	53
3.7.3	<i>Proposed Measures</i> .....	61

<b>3.8</b>	<b>Anglophone Agency Directors .....</b>	<b>63</b>
	3.8.1 <i>General Observations.....</i>	63
	3.8.2 <i>Obstacles .....</i>	63
	3.8.3 <i>Proposed Measures .....</i>	63
<b>3.9</b>	<b>Workers from Related Agencies.....</b>	<b>64</b>
	3.9.1 <i>General Observations.....</i>	64
	3.9.2 <i>Obstacles .....</i>	64
	3.9.3 <i>Proposed Measures .....</i>	72
<b>4.</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>FINAL WORD.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>84</b>
	<b>8.1 Confidentiality Form .....</b>	<b>84</b>
	<b>8.2 Questionnaire for Agency Directors .....</b>	<b>85</b>
	<b>8.3 Questionnaire for Francophone Support Workers .....</b>	<b>89</b>
	<b>8.4 Questionnaire for Anglophone Support Workers .....</b>	<b>92</b>
	<b>8.5 Questionnaire for Service Users .....</b>	<b>95</b>
	<b>8.6 List of Comité Réseau Member Organizations.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>99</b>

## Chapter 1

---

# Introduction

The Comité Réseau is an association of Francophone feminist support workers who work together to counter violence against women. Front line workers in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault who were also seeking support, a place to share their concerns and their expertise as well as an opportunity to come out of isolation, formed the Comité Réseau in 1988.

The mandate of the Comité Réseau is the following:

- To promote the well-being of women and children through social intervention
- To promote activities that educate the public about all forms of violence against women
- To exchange information about the initiatives of different agencies
- To coordinate services between agencies in order to maximize access to services for Francophone women
- To require agencies to be accountable to women and members regarding the quality, improvements and direction of their services
- To collaborate with other agencies in order to promote the continuation, improvement and development of services for Francophone women and children
- To support agencies that are members of the Comité Réseau in their service objectives, improvement and development
- To assist and support members
- To promote training programs as needed

This action-research project is situated within the framework of the on-going struggle of organizations working for women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. It is an initiative of the Comité Réseau which is made up of members from various Ottawa area organizations, all involved at some level with women and children. An appendix lists the organizations that are Comité Réseau members. Status of Women Canada, Women's Program, funded this project.

Front line support workers, counsellors in programs that address violence against women and agency directors supported this initiative in order to assist in identifying obstacles facing Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women when they attempt to access the French language services that they need. To this day, far too many women do not think it is possible to obtain services in French. They do not believe that French language services exist in a majority Anglophone province or that they have the right to services in French.

## 1.1 Context

Despite all the measures taken to eradicate violence against women and children, the situation of Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault is still very disturbing. This violence has multiple causes. Violence is present at all levels of society, but is more difficult to identify in more affluent sectors. In the more disadvantaged sectors, violence is easier to detect because victims access the different services they require: social assistance, medical and hospital care, counselling, housing aid, children's aid, legal aid.

According to statistics from Statistics Canada<sup>1</sup> presented in the *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCRS)* for the year 2000, women represented 85% of victims who reported domestic violence to police. Statistics from the *General Social Survey, Victimization (GSSV for 1999)*<sup>2</sup> reveal that the following persons were most likely to be victims of domestic violence:

- Young Canadian women between the ages of 15 and 24 years,
- Common law spouses,
- Persons whose spouse has an alcohol problem,
- Persons whose spouse is very dominant or emotionally abusive,
- Aboriginal women,
- Women who belong to a visible or linguistic minority,
- Women who are separated.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice, *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile, 2001*

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice, *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile, 2002*

Between 1991 and 2000, homicide between intimate partners represented 27 % of all homicides. During this period, 1,056 persons were killed by an intimate partner, including:

- 846 women (80% of the total): 481 of these were killed by their spouse, 185 by an ex-spouse from whom they were separated, 177 by an intimate partner and 3 by a same-sex partner.

In more than half the homicide cases that involved killing a spouse (58%), prior incidents of family violence had been reported to police.

Also according to the 2000 *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCRS)*, approximately two-thirds of women who are victims of violence were assaulted by their present spouse. One might presume that violence ends with separation or divorce. Studies indicate the contrary: 39% of the women victims reported incidents of violence after their separation; 24% of these victims stated that the incidents were more serious after the separation.

Women who are victims of violence do not only suffer physical consequences. Often there are serious financial consequences. In many cases, the women must leave the family home. The ex-spouse, who, in many instances refuses to accept the woman's request for separation, often uses money as a pressure tactic. The repercussions and psychological consequences often have long-term effects, forcing women and children into poverty. The women fear for their children's safety; their self-esteem is destroyed. Building a new life can be a long and arduous process.

Also according to the 1999 *General Social Survey, Victimization (GSSV)*<sup>3</sup>, approximately half a million children saw or heard their mother experience violence in the last five years. Children were more likely to witness violence acts against their mother (70%) than against their father (30%). The acts of violence they witnessed were more often more serious against their mother (57%).

Research indicates that children who witness domestic violence experience psychological effects. They suffer from behaviour problems, anxiety, worry, frustration and depression. Their development can be delayed. Often they perpetuate the cycle of violence of which they themselves were victims.

Violence in all its forms has serious societal consequences. The costs to society are substantial and inevitable. According to statistics from *Selected Estimates of the Costs of Violence Against Women, London (Ontario)* by L. Greaves, L.O. Hanskivsky and J. Kingston-Riechers, the economic costs associated with three types of violence – sexual assault, violence against a women in a intimate relationship and incest or sexual exploitation of a child – were as follows in 1995:

---

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice, *Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile, 2002*

<b>Social services</b>	2 368 924 297 \$
<b>Criminal justice</b>	871 908 583 \$
<b>Work and employment</b>	576 764 400 \$
<b>Health and health care</b>	408 357 042 \$
<b>Total</b>	4 225 954 322 \$

According to this study, government defrayed 87.5 % of the costs, the victims, 11.5 %, and a third party, 0.9 %. These figures demonstrate how important it is to work toward improving the lives of women and children.

More detailed statistics about sexual assault are available in the *Violence against Women Survey (VAWS)*<sup>4</sup> carried out in Canada in 1993. At that time, 39 % of adult Canadian women maintained that they had been victims of sexual assault at least once since they were 16 years old. In this survey, the definition of sexual assault includes both violent sexual assault and non-consensual sexual contact. Both of these definitions agree with the definitions of the Criminal Code. Unfortunately, the General Social Survey (GSS) of 1999 does not include data using this broader definition of sexual assault outside a conjugal relationship (marriage or common law), which explains the absence of comparative figures. However, the victimization surveys' results imply that only 10% or fewer of the women who are victims of sexual assault report the incident. (VAWS 1993; GSS 1999).

According to police, out of every ten victims who reported sexual violations to police in 2002, six (61 %) were children and young adults younger than 18 years of age. A large majority of the victims of sexual violations (85 %) were girls, according to data from 123 police services. The rate of sexual offences was highest for girls between the ages of 11 and 19, the highest rate for 13-year-old girls. (Statistics Canada)

Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women in the Ottawa region with whom we met have very diverse backgrounds, both economically and with respect to country of origin. The Canadian mosaic has considerably changed in the last ten years. Services for Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women should thus be adapted to the new provincial and national realities.

---

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Sexual Offences, July 2003

Violence against women is a crime. Society should not only protect women and children but should also implement measures that ensure that aggressors are held responsible for their actions and that women and their children can live in safety.

## 1.2 Project Objectives

The purpose of this action-research project is to identify the barriers faced by Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault when they seek services offered by agencies in the Ottawa region. It also aims to propose steps to improve service accessibility in order to respond more adequately to the specific and diverse needs of women and children who are victims of violence.

The specific objectives are the following:

1. Within the framework of an action-research project, to determine service accessibility deficiencies;
2. To ratify the results of the action-research project and to endorse focus group and individual participants' recommendations;
3. To assemble decision makers: government officials, agency directors and other support workers in order to urge them to implement the ratified recommendations.

## 1.3 Report Structure

**Methodology** Here we shall describe how we collected the data. We shall specifically outline:

- Data collection process
- Persons contacted
- Documents studied
- Development of questionnaires for individual and focus group meetings
- Organization of individual and focus group meetings with service users, specifically Francophone and French-speaking immigrant women; Francophone and Anglophone support workers; Francophone, bilingual and Anglophone agency directors; and meetings with persons who deal with women who are victims of

violence: lawyers, police officers, Children's Aid Society workers (CAS) and Ontario Works personnel. In order to respect the confidential nature of the information we gathered, we did not tape the interviews.

**Data Compilation and Analysis of the Results** Here we will present the highlights of the results divided into general observations, obstacles and proposed measures for each of the groups consulted. The analysis is based on all the data collected from all levels: individual meetings and focus groups. We will also present some data obtained through telephone interviews conducted in the last few months with persons who for various reasons did not have time to participate in focus groups. We decided that it is important to include this data because it describes the reality of many women. For security reasons, some women preferred to remain anonymous.

**Summary** Using the results of our analysis, we compiled a list of the main elements of the research. We highlighted commonly held and individual points and we grouped information.

**Recommendations** One of the research goals was the active participation of persons affected by and concerned with the issue of violence against women, service accessibility and equity for Francophone women. The recommendations aim to bring about necessary changes so that all women who are victims of violence might have adequate access to services. The recommendations are drawn from the measures proposed by:

- Service users in the Ottawa region
- Francophone, Anglophone and bilingual support workers
- Francophone, Anglophone and bilingual agency directors
- Others who work with women who are victims of violence, namely Children's Aid, Ontario Works and Ottawa Police personnel, Francophone and Anglophone family law lawyers who deal specifically with Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who are legal aid services recipients.

We recognize that access to services is problematic for women who speak neither English nor French and that their safety and that of their children must be ensured. We acknowledge the efforts of those groups of women working to improve access for women who speak neither English nor French. This is not however part of the mandate of this study.

## Chapter 2

---

# Methodology

## 2.1 Scope of the Survey

This action-research project focuses on the Ottawa region and specifically pertains to Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. As part of the study, we interviewed workers in rural areas for different reasons. One reason was that we often heard during the research interviews that the shortage of spaces in Francophone women's shelters and the lack of French language services for women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who live in the outlying region put a strain on the already limited resource network in the Ottawa region. These types of situations expose women to greater risks for their lives and the lives of their children and we wanted to determine the extent of the problem.

The shortage of shelter spaces in Ottawa also has an opposite effect: women are often obliged to leave the city. Some Francophone women, especially immigrant women, do not find this inconvenient, but others feel that they are penalized by a choice that really is not a choice for them. The isolation felt by immigrant women is often overwhelming. To be a woman of colour and a victim of violence in a Franco-Ontarian milieu can be extremely trying; cultural diversity is not always well understood. We shall see in the results and in the recommendations that these situations create additional obstacles for women who are victims of sexist violence.

## 2.2 Method

Our method consists of two phases:

**The first phase** includes a literature search and participation in various events. The purpose of this phase was to trace the evolution of French language services over the last few years, to assess the situation and to identify improvements required. This phase includes a literature search; the following documents were consulted and the following events were attended:

- *Inclusion for Women with Disabilities*, study by Deborah Chansonneuve, Accès, Violence faite aux femmes Group, Ottawa, (VFF 2000-2001).

- *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCRS 1993, 2000), General Social Survey, Victimization (GSSV 1999, 2000), General Social Survey (GSS 1999), Statistics Canada.*
- *Does Oppression of Francophone Women Exist? A Collective Analysis, by Ghislaine Sirois for Action Ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF), Ottawa, 1999.*
- *Enhancing the Capacity of the Voluntary Sector and the Justice System to Respond to Violence against Women, Symposium organized by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), by Ekuwa Smith, Ph. D., Ottawa, 2004.*
- Rencontre provinciale de concertation des intervenantes en violence contre les femmes, organized by Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, May and November 2003.

## **The Second Phase**

- Development of questionnaires for individual interviews and focus groups with service users, Francophone and Anglophone support workers and Francophone, Anglophone and bilingual agency directors. We made some changes to the questionnaires for immigrant and refugee women, for women without status (most often embassy personnel who resign because of mistreatment), and for women who had recently arrived in the Ottawa region because these women face many additional barriers. The questionnaires served as working documents, supplemented by individual meetings and focus groups.
- Interviews with support workers in the field. They were all contacted by telephone and were referred by Comité Réseau members. This was a crucial step in the process. If we wanted to reach Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence or of sexual assault or incest survivors, it would be necessary to first meet with front line workers who know their clientele. It can be at times very difficult for some women to speak about personal matters in a group setting. Without these preliminary meetings with the workers, it would have been impossible to meet the women. This step resulted in necessary adjustments to the design of the interviews.
- Meetings with directors of Francophone, Anglophone and bilingual agencies.

- Preparation for focus groups with Francophone support workers and service users.
- Interviews with workers from related services.

## 2.3 Participation

Focus groups and individual meetings with Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who are survivors of violence allowed them to speak about their lived experience and to participate in the development of recommendations. This aspect of the process is an essential one because it allows women who rarely have the opportunity to speak freely to do so. Having an integral role in this action-research project gives them a certain power that they had lost or perhaps never had. It is also part of their healing process.

The focus groups were based on the three components of the support process:

### **Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women –**

Clients are at the core of this initiative, so it stands to reason that we would want to learn about their experience regarding service accessibility.

**Front-line support workers** These women offer services to the clients and bring a working perspective to the subject of accessibility.

**Agency directors** We hoped these persons could provide us with additional information concerning policies implemented by their agency to facilitate accessibility for Francophone women who are victims of violence. They have the authority to bring about changes within their organization.

In the course of this action-research project, we met with 92 persons as follows:

#### *Individual meetings:*

Individual meetings varied from one and a half to two and a half hours in length. Most of the participants completed the questionnaire developed for this purpose.

- 18 Francophone support workers
- 9 Anglophone support workers, 2 of whom spoke French
- 10 Francophone agency directors
- 6 Anglophone agency directors
- 7 workers in related services

- 7 French-speaking immigrant women

*Focus Groups:*

- 14 Francophone support workers
- 21 Francophone women service users

We conducted different focus groups because the issues associated with domestic violence and those associated with sexual assault are very different. We conducted three focus groups with service users: one group of women who are victims of domestic violence, one of women who are incest survivors or sexual assault survivors and one group of women over 50 years of age, incest survivors or survivors of domestic violence. Most of the French-speaking immigrant women preferred individual interviews to focus group participation. We respected their request and adapted our method to the women's needs.

We also conducted a focus group with 14 Francophone support workers working in agencies: community resource centres, community health centres, women's shelters and second stage housing services.

New elements surfaced in the course of the research. To us they were very important and because of them, we decided to broaden the scope of our research. For example, during the different focus groups, access to the justice system surfaced as one of the systemic barriers faced by Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women. We will return to this issue in the results in point 3. In order to verify the information we received we extended our research to include persons directly connected with violence against women but at different stages of the process. In individual meetings, we met with Francophone and Anglophone lawyers specializing in family law. We also met with Ottawa Police workers, Ontario Works personnel and Children's Aid workers.

## **2.4 Ratification Meeting**

The action-research project results and recommendations will be discussed at this meeting. All persons who participated either directly or indirectly in the study were invited to a ratification meeting January 15, 2004, in order to discuss the results and recommendations suggested by all the participants.

# Results: Assessment of deficiencies

Why is it that to this day, only 10 % of women who are victims of violence seek help to break from a violence situation? What are the barriers faced by Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who are victims of violence? What steps must a woman take to find the services she needs? Does the system promote French language services? Are they easy to access? Do they correspond to the needs of Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women? What improvements are necessary in order that more than 10% of women who are victims of violence can access adequate French language services? This action-research project will attempt to answer these questions.

In this section, we will review the results of our interviews with the various groups that participated in the research. The results are divided into three headings: general observations, obstacles and proposed measures.

Under the general observations and obstacles headings, we will highlight the main issues as defined by individual and group participants.

Under the proposed measures heading, we will present the participants' suggestions that will be used in formulating the final recommendations that we hope will be implemented by service providers and decision makers.

### **3.1 Francophone Clientele Who are Victims of Domestic Violence**

The Francophone clientele that participated in the focus groups was made up of women of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. A broad spectrum was evident. Some women came from more affluent surroundings and had university and college educations, while other women came from a very poor environment. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 76.

Participants are from the Ottawa region. Most of them have received support services in different city community resource centres. Some had lived in a women's shelter or in an emergency shelter for periods ranging in length from a few weeks to a few months, then in second stage housing before finally obtaining subsidized housing.

One support worker remarked in this regard:



*“Affluent women often have access to private services: they are thus more difficult to identify. Women from a poor environment who are victims of violence are identifiable because at one time or another they seek services.”*

## 3.1.1 General Observations

---

We first consider service users: the women answered all the questions found in the questionnaire (appendix). The questions dealt with their lived experience, the obstacles they faced in accessing services: how they found services and whether the services met their needs; how many years they lived in violent circumstances before they sought assistance; the most difficult experiences they had in seeking services; and what service improvements they would suggest.

Even if society recognizes the issue of violence against women, much prejudice remains, making it extremely difficult especially for women who are survivors of sexual assault or incest. Women who are victims of violence tend to feel ashamed of their situation. Much too often they carry the burden of guilt. Asking for help takes courage. The first step is definitely the most difficult. When women see their children affected by their spouse's violence, they seek aid for the children. Support workers observe this daily. They establish contacts with the women through dealing with the children, especially in the case of immigrant or refugee women who are less likely to report the violence they experience. Women who are victims of violence will hesitate for a long time before leaving the family home because they know the road ahead is difficult. They know their economic situation might deteriorate, resulting in poverty.

The Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence spoke of two types of obstacles: personal and institutional.

Overall, the women we met all said the first step was the most difficult. Some participants had lived in a violent environment for many decades and had for all intents and purposes never obtained services or tried to locate services. They had only perhaps consulted their family physician who most of the time did not make a connection between their clients' repeated bouts of depression and the fact that perhaps they were living in violent domestic circumstances or were incest survivors. For years, these women only received medication as treatment, until they finally discovered that some French language services existed and they dared to request these services.

## 3.1.2 Obstacles

---

The women listed the following obstacles:

### Personal Obstacles

- Fear of taking the first step
- Language barriers
- Not knowing support services existed
- Lack of self-confidence, low self image



*“When you already feel so belittled, how can you ask for something? In any case, I did not know I could request services in French. I felt so ashamed of myself, ashamed of my situation, ashamed of my life.”*

These words, unfortunately often repeated, clearly demonstrate to what point women bear the burden of guilt and that their self-esteem is at its lowest.

- Suicidal tendencies

This point often surfaced both in focus groups and in individual meetings, with the women and with the support workers.



*“When you’ve reached the end of the road, on the brink of suicide with medication in hand, then there is a spark of light. I decided at last that this was enough and that I needed help. At that point, I called my daughter to bring me to emergency. If I had not reached her I would have committed suicide.”*

- Guilt
- Lack of transportation, distance from services
- Isolation of women
- Loss of social status and possible loss of children

- Fear of being judged or not believed
- Fear of damaging the family reputation or the spouse's career

## **Institutional Obstacles**

Here we shall list the obstacles reported by service users categorized according to the services they access: women's shelters, services specific to women who are victims of violence, immigrant women's services, sexual assault services, institutions such as hospitals, Ontario Works, Children's Aid Society, police, legal services: legal aid, courts, lawyers.

### **Women's Shelters**

Here are the main obstacles reported:

- Shortage of beds
- Occasional necessity of using so-called bilingual women's shelters offering few or no French language services: it is a difficult ordeal for a woman who speaks little or no English to find herself in an Anglophone shelter or a so-called bilingual shelter where French language services are sporadic and inadequate. Her stay can be traumatic for many reasons. The woman will not benefit from the same services or support. In the best-case scenario, she receives interpretive services. Women who have stayed in Anglophone women's shelters have felt very isolated; many of them chose to return to their spouse while waiting for a bed in a Francophone shelter.
- Lack of service visibility
- Language barriers
- Shortage of resources for children who witness violence
- Excessively long waiting period for space. More and more women must call many times before obtaining a space. Women with many children experience even more difficulty.
- Longer and longer stays in women's shelters. Before the previous Conservative government's budget cuts, women obtained subsidized housing fairly quickly. Now, this is not the case. For over ten years, the Ontario government has not invested new funds in construction of social housing. The shortage of safe and

affordable housing has resulted in an unprecedented crisis in the community, creating stress for agency personnel. Not knowing where to go, women remain for longer periods in women's shelters or in unhealthy and dangerous living situations.

## Hospitals

Here are the main obstacles reported:

Significant shortcomings exist in hospitals. For example, many women told us they had been to a hospital and had not been referred to services in French. Personnel often spoke to them in English even if they had made it clear they spoke French; the women did not dare to reply in French for fear of disturbing the personnel. Franco-Ontarians from disadvantaged sectors who have a poor command of either French or English often have little formal education. They find it difficult to insist on services in French and to assert their rights because in addition to not being aware of them, they feel devalued because of their poverty. According to statements from various support workers in the field, some Franco-Ontarian women have a very poor quality of life because the system does not even respect their right to services in French. Some highly educated women also hesitate to ask to be served in French. Some women would say that French language services are readily available, but among women who are victims of violence this is certainly not the general feeling. Often a woman learns of French language services by chance, through a friend, a work colleague, or a relative.

- Language barriers
- Incorrect referrals
- Incorrect diagnosis
- Over medication



*“When my physician saw me, he did not attempt to understand what I was living. I had been depressed for a long time. Who wouldn't be depressed when your father had abused you for many years and your mother could not protect you. These things have long-term effects. My spouse was violent, my physician gave me pills, I took all kinds of them and my life did not improve; on the contrary, everything got worse. Finally, a friend told me about an organization and groups in which I could participate in French. I called the support worker who called back right away. I began in a group a few months later but in the meantime, I was able to see a support worker on an individual basis. I began to feel better. Finally, someone was listening to me. The group experience was very beneficial, even though I was apprehensive*

*about being in a group with other women who were victims. I was very committed to the group even though I was discouraged from time to time. It seemed to me that I had buried so much anger and suffering deep inside of me, but we all had a similar experience. Finally this experience allowed me to come out of isolation, to put an end to my guilt and to partly heal me.”*

Many other participants reported having lived similar experiences.

On this topic, one participant said:



*“I have lived with violence since I was six years old and I am now 37. You can see how many years I have lived with violence. When I learned of a Francophone shelter, I called right away. It took almost three months before a space became available. I am only beginning to learn English and from a very early age, I experienced being left out because I did not speak English. I have had the experience of approaching an agency for services and being told by the reception personnel “The French woman is not here today”, or even, “I do not speak French today”. When I had to live in an Anglophone shelter due to lack of space in the Francophone shelter, I felt ignored by personnel who did not try to understand me.”*

## **Women’s Services**

The following obstacles were identified:

- Lack of service visibility
- Filling the spaces in a French group takes too long. In some cases, the group is cancelled or the client will seek services in English even though she does not speak much English.
- Referrals from one agency to another not always made
- Traveling distance too great
- Lack of flexibility of some services
- Difficult to find affordable and safe housing
- Inadequate resources for children who witness violence
- Loss of social status or possibility of losing one’s children

- Language barrier
- Difficult to access legal aid services
- Difficult to find Francophone lawyers

## **Police Services**

A police officer is generally the first contact for a woman who has experienced violence. This meeting is crucial because it plays a role in determining what a woman will do next. A humane and respectful approach is essential for the woman who is extremely vulnerable and is suffering greatly. In many instances but not generally speaking, women reported difficult experiences with the police. Present systems must change in order that women not view police officers as insensitive and lacking understanding but rather as persons they can count on to protect them from danger.

- Fear of not being well received

Among the difficulties some women experience with certain police officers is aggressivity and lack of consideration. More often than not women have felt misunderstood by the officers. This however was not the general feeling. A retired police officer confirmed that some of his colleagues found it difficult to understand a woman who is a victim of violence returning home to her spouse who hits her and after she calls 911. This police officer said he often returned up to six times to the same home. These police officers are seen as impatient persons who do not always understand the complexities of domestic violence. Some women have been subjected to offensive and sometimes humiliating words from police officers. It can be even more serious for immigrant women who will hesitate to call 911 for different reasons that will be listed later on in section 3.3: French-Speaking Immigrant Women Clientele.

- Offensive language and comments
- Counter-accusations

Since the principle of zero tolerance in dealing with violence has come into effect, it has exposed women to counter-accusations. When a police officer arrives at a home, all a man has to do is accuse his wife of hitting him; she will be handcuffed and apprehended at the same time as her spouse. When children are present, the officer calls a Children's Aid (CAS) worker and children are placed under CAS care pending the police report. This new measures are humiliating, unjust and result in serious consequences for women who are victims of violence and their children, especially for women from ethno cultural communities.

- Fear of being identified and labelled, especially in a rural milieu

- Sometimes the abuser is a friend of the police officers: this type of situation prevents the women from reporting the abuse they suffer.

## **Children's Aid Society Services**

The mandate of the Children's Aid Society is to protect children from witnessing and being victims of abuse and violence. The Children's Aid Society often intervenes after a telephone call from a neighbour or through the school or police. The mothers sometimes request temporary placement. At the time of our study, about 1100 children were in the care of the Children's Aid Society.

The following obstacles were identified:

- Few or no French language services.

One participant in one of the groups had her children placed permanently in the care of the Children's Aid Society. In addition to being separated from each other, the woman's French-speaking children were placed in Anglophone foster homes. Because she did not speak English, she was always had the feeling that she had no say in the important decisions that concerned her: placing the children, the decision about divorce. She did not receive French language services. When she found her children when they were adults, they no longer spoke French. Her story is a dramatic one. She is an incest survivor and a victim of domestic violence, she also had her children removed from her, and today, at 50 years of age, her heart is burdened. How could she forget all the suffering and injustices she endured all her life? How might it be possible to establish relationships with her children in such circumstances?

- Lack of understanding on the part of the system regarding the issue of violence against women.
- Victimization of the women who are victims of violence because they are held responsible for the safety of their children, given that the aggressor is not held responsible.
- Arbitrary placements. The system does not always take language, religion and culture of the children and family into consideration.
- Feeling misunderstood by the CAS and especially feeling they are being negatively judged by the system.

## 3.1.3 Proposed Measures

---

1. French language services are a recognized right in regions designated by the *French Language Services Act of 1986*, thus one should not have to fight to obtain services in French.
2. Make services more visible.
3. More services in French. Waiting periods are still too long; as a result, women often turn to services in English.
4. Improve referrals to appropriate and available services.
5. On-going training for police officers, awareness programs that deal with violence against women and of the needs of Francophones of local origin and from elsewhere.
6. Need for more Francophone lawyers and judges.
7. Improve access to legal aid.
8. Assist women to access available resources in cases of abuse by the system.
9. Anglophone services should recognize the importance of being well informed about available French language services in order to direct women who wish to be served in French to the necessary resources.
10. Develop awareness programs in the community.
11. Open a new French language women's shelter.

In this regard, we wish to mention that Maison d'amitié has been mandated to open a new French language 15-bed shelter in Ottawa. The project is progressing, though slowly because of zoning requirements, among other reasons.

## 3.2 Francophone Clientele Who are Survivors of Incest or Sexual Assault

### 3.2.1 General Observations

---

Even today in our modern, contemporary and open society, we must emphasize that sexual assault remains a taboo subject and that much prejudice is directed against women incest survivors. Many barriers surfaced. We observed that it is still difficult to break the silence. Women find it very difficult to deal openly with these questions. This violence affects the women profoundly. They were often abused within the family, making it even more difficult for them to deal with the situation. Most of the survivors told their story many years after the fact; some waited until the aggressor's death. All the sexual assault survivors who participated in this study found that the process of obtaining French language services was long and trying.

The women spoke of two types of obstacles: personal and institutional.

### 3.2.2 Obstacles

---

#### Personal Obstacles

- Fear of reporting the assault because in many cases the assault takes place within the family or the aggressor is close to the family, and is sometimes someone with a certain amount of status in the community. The consequences of exposing the violence seem insurmountable for the women. They do not wish to break up the family or damage their reputation.
- When an aggressor is highly regarded in society, therefore in a position of power, women find it more difficult to speak about the violence they experience.



*"I was abused as an adolescent by a friend of the family who was a police officer. I could not say anything until the day my father died and I could not live any longer with this burden in my heart and in my body. It is now thirty years later and I am still not over the experience and the disclosure caused many problems for me because the abuser is a police officer."*

- Women often feel responsible for the aggression of which they are victims. They also feel ashamed because of what they have experienced.
- Women fear that no one will believe them or that their experience will not be validated.
- Women fear losing social status, becoming poor, losing their children.
- Women fear being judged by their peers.
- Women do not always know that French language services exist in their region. If services are not easily accessible, women in their vulnerable state will find it difficult to find a way to access adequate services.
- Fear of rejection and isolation.

The family often rejected the participants who disclosed incest. It is very difficult to live with this type of isolation.

## **Institutional Obstacles**

- Few French language services, not always well identified
- Language choice not available
- Incorrect diagnosis
- Institutions' non-recognition of woman's experience
- Excessively long waiting lists for French language services
- Franco phobia – Many women said that they felt discriminated against because they spoke French.
- Negative judgement – There is much prejudice regarding incest and sexual assault
- Women are revictimized by the burden and the consequences of the steps they take to deal with their situation.
- Lack of sensitivity and knowledge of the issue on the part of the police, even female officers.

- Difficulty finding Francophone lawyers willing to defend women
- Fear of losing their children and seeing them handed over to the CAS
- Physicians tend to prescribe medication for depression instead of trying to understand the relationship between depression and women's lived experience.
- Women are often sent from one service to another.

The women said they were able to carry on only because of their own persistence, support workers' excellent listening skills and their own participation in support groups.



*"We must really hang on in order not to give up on the process along the way."*



*"My abuse happened in my childhood. After many years in psychiatric care, I never connected repeated bouts of depression with the abuse. When I began looking for services, I always got answering machines. I approached an Anglophone centre; this service lacked information and did not direct me to French language services. Finally women told me that French language services did exist."*



*"I was raped a few years ago by an officer of the law. It was very difficult to find a lawyer who would represent me. I called 12 lawyers before I found one who would represent me."*

### 3.2.3 Proposed Measures

The participants of this focus group made proposals that, if implemented, will result in improving the lives of women who are sexual assault survivors and women who have not yet broken through their wall of silence.

- 12.** Provide access to a whole spectrum of French language services.

- 13.** Increase the visibility of available services through awareness campaigns in hospitals, schools and clinics.
- 14.** Inject money into existing resources and adapt services to clients' needs.
- 15.** Improve coordination of the different available services.
- 16.** Recruit more women for the police force and train them to deal with the issue of sexual assault.
- 17.** Train more Francophone lawyers and judges. Language should be a criterion in the selection process for judges.
- 18.** Recruit Francophone personnel for reception positions in all services that deal with women who are victims of sexual assault: sexual assault centres, community resource centres, community health centres, women's shelters, shelters managed by the City of Ottawa.
- 19.** In primary schools, provide awareness campaigns dealing with sexual assault.
- 20.** Promote the rights of Francophones to quality French language services.
- 21.** Respect the women's difficult journey. The process can be very slow; offer them adequate support.
- 22.** Assist with some of the steps in the process and with procedures that not only can be humiliating, but that also can take excessively long and can make the women feel vulnerable.
- 23.** Consider the children's mother tongue when they are put in the care of the Children's Aid Society.
- 24.** Respect sex trade workers: rape is rape, for all women, regardless of their profession.
- 25.** Review psychiatric evaluation criteria.
- 26.** Publish more brochures about available services.
- 27.** Change the way police services operate so that women do not feel victimized a second time. Some women do not feel protected by the police.

## 3.3 French-speaking Immigrant Women Clientele

### 3.3.1 General Observations

---

Initially we were to organize focus groups for immigrant women. Most of the women however preferred individual meetings. Even though some had lived in women's shelters in Ottawa where they did participate in group meetings, they preferred to speak of their experience in private. We supported this initiative, recognizing that it is not always easy for women to share their lived experience in a group setting. Because women's shelters, community resource centres and other Ottawa region resource centres deal more and more with immigrant women, we adapted our method to suit the needs.

The French-speaking immigrant women we met for the most part are from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the West Indies. We noted that there were few women of Asian origin in women's shelters, whereas ten years ago they did seek shelter services. Most of the participants have been in Canada for many years although some arrived recently and are waiting for determination of their status. Originally from countries engaged in armed conflict, most of the women left their country in turmoil. Some lived in refugee camps before arriving in Canada. A large majority of the women were deeply affected by these conflicts or suffered directly from the violence. They had witnessed atrocities that are difficult to forget. Others on the other hand were victims of collective rapes and other types of violence. Some women suffered profoundly. It is difficult to imagine what a woman and her family might have experienced before their arrival in Canada: loss of and separation from their loved ones, life in refugee camps in makeshift living conditions, and the wait for asylum in one of the countries that signed the Geneva Convention<sup>5</sup>. This Convention protects refugees from being returned to their country where they would face persecution. An immigrant woman sitting next to us on the bus might well have experienced these things.

Many support workers who work with immigrant women mentioned that they often felt helpless in the face of the violence their clients have experienced and they realize to what extent methods of intervention need to be adapted to this new reality. Support workers lack the resources to deal with new challenges and especially to assist immigrant women who lived these horrors to begin rebuilding their lives. Many myths, stereotypes and prejudices must be named and confronted.

A study recently published by Statistics Canada concerning immigrant economic circumstances shows that since 1980, immigrant poverty has increased. Before

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1951, Canada signed the Geneva Convention and the 1967 United Nations Protocol. This Convention protects refugees from being returned to their country where they would face persecution. See <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.html>

1980, it was possible for immigrants' revenue to be higher than the national average, but today this is no longer the case.<sup>6</sup>

Education levels vary greatly. Many women have a college or university education. Others on the other hand, come from rural areas and have only some secondary education. We note that more and more young women come to Canada to study. Some women who are sponsored by family members are victims of sexual assault by the sponsor who often expects sexual favours.

## 3.3.2 Obstacles

---

We have classified the obstacles reported in these interviews into two categories: personal obstacles and institutional obstacles:

### Personal Obstacles

- Isolation, fear of leaving the house, lack of self-confidence.
- Women have little or no knowledge of the country, its infrastructures and the mechanics of the system.
- Some immigrant women do not speak English. Because Ontario is a majority Anglophone province, almost all the women either did not know about existing French language services or had not been informed of them.
- Women are often in survival mode, waiting to obtain status, looking for work, trying to deal with radical changes while attempting to stabilize their life; violence is not one of their priorities in the context of the reality of their life.
- Fear of being judged by Canadian society if they report violence.
- Some do not recognize that their situation is unacceptable according to Canadian norms.
- Unaware of the rights and laws of the country.

---

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Earnings of immigrant workers and Canadian-born workers, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003

- Often the spouse will not permit the woman to take courses or training and even less often allow her to take part in women's support groups.
- Sometimes a husband who sponsors his wife pressures her, threatening to report her to immigration. Women fear deportation to their country of origin.
- Women do not wish to be ostracized by their cultural community; therefore, they hesitate to denounce the violence.
- Fear of retaliation by community members.
- Fear of losing their children and seeing them sent to foster homes.

## Institutional Obstacles

- Racism, prejudice, stereotypes in various support services, for example, police services, some Ontario Works workers, and especially in the allocation of social housing. This will be addressed in other sections because it has been clearly stated by various groups.
- Incorrect service identification and services not adapted to needs.
- Women's economic difficulties, extreme poverty.
- Difficulty finding space in women's shelters that offer French language services.



*"I found myself in an Anglophone shelter after my husband made my children and I leave our home. I do not speak any English, no one could help me, and I could not benefit from the same services as the other women because no one in this shelter spoke French. At night, when I was feeling down, I had no one to talk to, whereas the other residents could get help. Finally, they found me a space in a Francophone shelter; there it was better for me and my children."*



*"Because there was no space in any Ottawa shelter, I found myself outside the city with my children. I did not like this at all, I felt lost and my children did not attend school. Finally after several weeks I was transferred to an Anglophone shelter where only one staff person spoke French."*

- Shortage of safe and affordable housing
- Non-recognition of diplomas obtained outside Canada

The question of recognizing diplomas and experience acquired outside Canada remains an important one for immigrant and refugee women. How is a woman to integrate into a country when she is not able to work? How can a person who has lost everything because of armed conflict in her country plan to return to school that is so expensive when she has to support her family?



*“In my country, I was a dental surgeon for more than 17 years; I arrived as a refugee, I am happy to be in a country where I feel safe, many of my friends had been assassinated. I know that here I cannot work as a surgeon; my training is not recognized. For months I have taken casual jobs, I try to survive and to be accommodating, but why allow us to come if we are not given the same opportunities?”*

- Shortage of culturally diverse personnel in women’s shelters, some organizations, and different institutions: police service, Ontario Works, CAS, hospitals affects the cultural sensitivity of service delivery.
- Difficulty accessing legal aid
- Lack of trust in the system. Many women come from countries where unfortunately corruption is prevalent, where police behaviour can often be arbitrary and where justice depends on what one can afford. These women find it very difficult to trust persons they do not know, in a strange country with different mentalities.
- Women are not always that eager to avail themselves of a cultural interpreter, but this is necessary if the women are to be helped. In fact, some women are afraid to speak and do not understand or do not believe in the principle of confidentiality for the aforementioned reasons.



*“I am the only survivor in my family; I lost everyone in the armed conflict in my country of origin. I have been here a few years and for six months, I lived with a man whose ex-spouse died of AIDS. This man had not told me anything about his past and he wanted to force me to have unprotected sexual relations. I had to leave because when I learned the truth I was afraid. I asked myself how I could have done this. I was escaped death in my country and here I was ready to enter a relationship with a man who had no respect for me. It was very difficult for me to handle all this.*



*After facing many obstacles, I was able to find space in a Francophone shelter where I received much support and where I learned that non-consensual sexual relations, even with someone I liked, were wrong.”*

*“I arrived in Ontario with my five children; I was running away from a violent spouse. I stayed with a friend and I approached Ontario Works, who in the beginning did not even want to meet with me. After many tears and much perseverance, I was finally heard. I had to wait many hours with my five children. The agent wanted me to return to my friend’s house and eventually to Quebec. Finally they sent me to a city shelter where I was not accepted. The Ontario Works worker sent me to a city motel with a cheque for \$100.00, but there was no kitchen in the room. I could not cook for my children. Also, I had no bank account, so it was almost impossible for me to cash the cheque. I left my children in the motel room for the day so I could look for housing. I was worried about them because there was little food. I stayed at the motel for two weeks with \$100.00 for food and transportation. Ontario Works was pressuring me to return to Montreal, offering bus tickets for my children and me. I did not want to go back because I had suffered so much with my spouse. I would be fearful for my children and myself if I stayed in the city in which he lived. I know my spouse could get someone to hit me in the street. Finally, they found me a space in a shelter where only one worker spoke French. I finally felt I was somewhere I could be heard. I felt accompanied and supported in all my endeavours, even though the daily hurdles were difficult. I obtained subsidized housing but I know that the best houses are not given to immigrant women. The house was very dilapidated. When you feel worthless, you accept anything. I received training, but there I saw how being African and Francophone is a barrier. I also realized that it was next to impossible to get work. I felt the barriers and the prejudice against women of colour. I came to Canada as a refugee, having lost track of my husband. The spouse in Montreal is not the father of my children. I have not heard from my husband since I have been in Canada, I do not know if he is dead or alive. I look at my life, and even though I have been here for many years, I still do not know if I will be able to provide a good life for me and my children. Of all the difficulties I faced, for me the most difficult was racism, feeling that persons did not believe my story, and wondering if I will ever be able to manage.”*

- Some women said that their stories are not always believed; they have the feeling that others think they are lying in order to obtain services for which they would not otherwise have the right.

- Some women said they had to call a shelter many times before obtaining space. Sometimes the wait is excessively long. This is an additional source of stress in already difficult circumstances.
- Some women who do not speak English were not able to make themselves understood on the telephone. They had to hang up because they did not understand what they were being told.
- Some women stated that they experienced violence in their country of origin but had never identified it as such. There, resources are almost non-existent.

Most women say they have to rebuild their lives. The suffering they endured is too great and the pain is still too vivid. There is too much to do and at the same time, they do not want to give up knowing that a new life is possible; the process however is not easy. Women emphasized the isolation they feel; they find it difficult to handle. Women often live in the past, in what they left behind, what they lost, the relatives they had to leave behind. Family ties are often strong, making separation difficult. The difficulties facing families affect the relationship between the couple. Even if women seem to be more adaptable than their husbands are, the compromises they are willing to make are not always easy but they more easily accept these situations. They often work in jobs for which they are overqualified while their husbands find it more difficult to accept jobs seen as less valuable. This behaviour can lead to violence not previously experienced by the woman, and directly connected with the difficulties encountered in adapting to the new country.

An immigrant woman, a physician in her country of origin, must return to school to study nursing; for this, she needs financial resources. This type of situation is frequent and applies to various professions that have very strict requirements in Canada. For educated immigrant women, integration can occur in a few years whereas for women who did not receive an education in their country, it will be more difficult. They risk remaining in a violent situation for a long time, with many repercussions for herself and her children.

- Some women who contacted services such as the police, Ontario Works, CAS, said they were not offered services in French. Most people think that in addition to their first language, immigrant women speak English.
- For many women, women's shelters are a last resort because having to live communally with other women who are victims of traumatic event in their lives intensifies their own pain. Even if most women's shelters have a zero tolerance policy regarding racism and violence, sometimes it is very difficult for women who have

different values to live together under one roof. Some women do not go to women's shelters for this reason.

### **3.3.3 Proposed Measures**

---

28. Denounce and fight against racism.
29. Immigrant women should have access to services that are adapted to their needs. Interpretation should not replace French language services.
30. Recognition of diplomas received in country of origin.
31. Simplify certain procedures; improve access to the justice system.
32. Improve the visibility of services for French-speaking immigrant women.
33. Equitable access to safe and affordable housing, avoid creating ghettos.
34. Organize a forum on racism in the city of Ottawa.
35. Immigrant women should be better informed of their rights.
36. Increase the number of beds in women's shelters.
37. Awareness campaigns for different services working with immigrant women who are victims of violence.

## **3.4 Marginalized Women Clientele**

### **3.4.1 General Observations**

---

Marginalized women are in a precarious situation. They face numerous obstacles; they are often left to fend for themselves in dangerous circumstances. They can have serious health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, mental health problems. Marginalized women often have experienced abuse in their childhood. Their extreme poverty aggravates their circumstances because they cannot afford what they need. These women do not always eat enough; staying healthy can be expensive. More and more young women who have been sexually assaulted, who are over medicated and

poorly treated frequent day centres. These women have lost contact with their family; some have spent many years in foster homes. Many young Francophone girls who lived in Anglophone foster homes no longer speak French.

The Francophone organizations that work with this clientele expressed their concerns about the decreasing commitment to public services and the lack of resources for assisting marginalized women.

## 3.4.2 Obstacles

---

- Lack of financial resources for organizations that work with this clientele.
- Women are not always aware of available services.
- Some resource centres or other agencies do not wish to accept marginalized clientele because the issues are more complex and this might create problems for agencies that are not equipped to work with these women.
- Funding disparities on the municipal level for some agencies that work with marginalized clientele.
- Women are in survival mode, long term solutions must be found, not band-aid solutions.

## 3.4.3 Proposed Measures

---

38. Increase funding and resources for organizations that work with a marginalized clientele.
39. On-site services in agencies that accept marginalized women. This is important because marginalized women have specific needs. Often this barrier affects the quality of the services they receive.
40. Work with government to promote awareness of the specific needs of marginalized francophone women.

## 3.5 Francophone Support workers

### 3.5.1 General Observations

---

The support workers we met individually or in focus groups work in the support network that serves Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

The individual interviews allowed us on the one hand to promote the project in the network as well as to establish contacts that encouraged collaboration in the action-research project. On the other hand, the interviews encouraged the support workers to take time to think about the issues and to prepare their clients who eventually would accept to participate in focus groups or individual interviews. Without this step and this support, it would have been impossible to reach service users.

### 3.5.2 Obstacles

---

We have categorized list of barriers and challenges identified by participants as follows:

- Service accessibility
- Coordination of resources
- The issue of violence against women
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Legal custody
- Poverty

We wish to emphasize however that some barriers and challenges could be classified in more than one category, but to avoid repetition, we have listed them in what we consider the most applicable category.

## Service Accessibility

- The 1995 budget cuts had a significant impact on all services for Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women: positions eliminated, reduction in hours of service and accompaniment programs. Services had to do more with less money.
- Lack of service visibility, lack of coordination between the different resources, lack of knowledge about programs offered by other city agencies affecting provision of services for clients. Service users are not always informed of available resources in their neighbourhood, and are thus obliged travel outside their district.
- Shortage of beds in women's shelters or in second stage housing. Support workers spend a lot of time on the telephone looking for space for their clients.
- The lack of safe and affordable housing results in clients remaining for longer periods in violent situations, thus putting their lives and the lives of their children in danger.
- Despite a significant Francophone population in some sectors of the city, agencies still find it very difficult to reach Francophone clientele. In the west end of the city where there are three Francophone schools, the resource centre only deals with 10% of the population. Some workers suggest the reasons for this are as follows: 1) There has not been continuity in French language services, and this prevents the establishment of French language services 2) We do not reach Francophone clientele in the same manner as Anglophone clientele, for example through personal contacts.
- Lack of resources for programs for children who have witnessed violence.
- A support worker who deals with a bilingual client who speaks French and English will not automatically offer French language service. If the woman is not aware of her rights, she will not request this service. French language service is not always perceived as a necessity.
- The workers emphasize discrepancies in linguistic standards. For example, the level of knowledge of French required of an Anglophone worker is lower than the level of English required of a

Francophone worker. This has an impact on the quality of the services received by the client.

- Some programs lack flexibility.
- Too far to travel even if transportation and childcare expenses are covered by the services.
- Not enough documentation in French.
- Not enough Francophone lawyers who accept legal aid certificates.
- Women's shelters find it difficult to reach lesbian clientele even if in principle there is no discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- Because of the shortage of space in Ottawa, women are obliged to leave the city.
- Insufficient services during the summer months despite the fact that more women tend to leave their spouse during this period. Closing one women's shelter each summer puts additional strain and greater workload on other available resources.
- City of Ottawa forms are not always available in French. Requests must be submitted in English. This is a handicap for women who have not mastered English or do not speak English.
- Sexual assault is rarely mentioned in documentation or in information on violence.
- Crisis lines – It is easier for women to call the Anglophone crisis line; the Francophone line is not well known.
- The housing registry. The applications are reviewed sooner if they are in English because either few or no staff speaks French. The women find this very difficult because they do not understand and the support workers must do the work for them. The situation is more serious in the case of legal documents. It is important that a woman know what she is signing. In these situations, women feel insecure, adding to their level of stress.
- Some city shelters lack support services for women who are victims of violence. "*We consider these locations unsafe for women.*" Support workers find it difficult to refer women to such locations. In some city shelters, we found that the Francophone reality was poorly acknowledged; it was not a priority.

- It is more difficult to find a Francophone interpreter than an interpreter for an ethno cultural language. Some funding sources do not consider French language services a priority. Agencies feel obliged to abide by the priorities of those who fund them.
- Many other difficulties with interpretation were highlighted. Some Anglophone workers do not understand why a woman whose second language is French would not want to deal with an interpreter from her cultural community. The women fear breach of confidentiality. In addition, they fear rejection by their community and by their family.
- Women are not always informed of their rights. Sometimes they are not informed of the required documents. Thus, they lose the possibility of subsidized housing. This type of situation is seen also with some Ontario Works agents where some groups of cultural communities are not informed of their rights. Women do not receive all the help they should receive. Some support workers define this problem as racism against a certain clientele. Many immigrant women of colour said they experienced racism and that they did not always feel comfortable requesting services.
- Too many women access services indirectly, that is through the children who are having a hard time because they witness violence in the family. If the support worker fails to link children's nightmares to the family situation, often women do not get help. There are insufficient resources for programs for children who witness violence.
- Not enough posted material in French (less French documentation, smaller budget to produce this information).
- Presumption on the part of users that there are no French language services.
- Unavailability of meeting space. At the present time an organization has a group planned but does not have access to space.
- The crisis line is not equipped to provide follow-up and deals only with crises.

## **Service Coordination**

- Coordination problems among some agencies. Referrals are not always made; many support workers wonder why when women

call the crisis line that they are not always referred to services in their area. Women have to travel from one end of the city to another when they could be served close to their home. Better referrals would encourage a woman to continue her therapy because she often becomes discouraged.

- Are women who work with women who are victims of violence well informed of the services offered in Ottawa?
- Some support workers described some agency funding disparities. Are the funding criteria for grants applied to everyone? These perceived or real disparities create tensions in the community and do not always foster sharing and collaboration among the different city services.
- Increased workload for support workers. In the past ten years client needs have increased and changed. Support workers face many more difficult and complex cases, while resources remain the same, or decrease.
- Some support workers say they find themselves divided between the paperwork required of them by their managers and the fact that it sometimes takes time before a woman who is a victim of violence will speak of her experience. Support workers often need more time with some women; establishing trust is part of the process. They are caught between the funders' requirements and the reality of the front line.
- From time to time, some Francophone support workers have to interpret for other agencies during work hours because somewhere a woman is in crisis and the agency has not found an interpreter. This happens frequently, and increases the support workers' workload. These additional responsibilities are not part of their job description. They respond out of compassion for the woman in crisis and because they wish to remain on good terms with the Anglophone agencies. More French language services are needed.
- Many support workers said it is more difficult to find a Francophone interpreter than an interpreter of any other language.
- Support workers are exhausted. Many support workers feel powerless in the face of the extreme poverty and misery of the women and children. They know that the expectations are very high. Due to limited resources, they know that they can only do so much and they find this difficult. They are witness to all the difficulties the women face and want to overcome. It is true that

women feel protected in women's shelters; there is total support at all levels. The support workers fear that once the women leave the shelter, their resources will be inadequate. They know what challenges the women will have to face. Concretely, how can a woman with one or more children live decently when social assistance is her only source of revenue? Does this not perpetuate the poverty cycle with all its consequences? Generally, women's resources are exhausted within the first two weeks of the month; there is not much money left. They have to rely on food banks and other resources, thus maintaining the cycle of poverty.

- The work environment in women's shelters is difficult and stressful. Often there is little space for meeting or working. Most of the women's shelters are under funded. The homes are not always maintained to desired levels. Furniture wears out quickly but cannot be replaced regularly.
- In an Anglophone milieu, Francophone support workers often feel very isolated in addition to having more work. Often a Francophone support worker has to take on the responsibilities of a number of positions if she is the only Francophone resource person. She must be versatile. In many agencies, she has to provide counselling, lead groups, promote programs; humanly speaking it is too much.
- Insufficient on-going training for support workers even if there is willingness. There are few available resources in this regard.
- Shortage of human resources personnel and high staff turnover affects service accessibility. Often one must start from the beginning instead of doing follow-up.

## **The Issue of Violence against Women**

- Support workers encounter many taboos concerning violence against women, particularly sexual assault and incest.
- According to the support workers, most immigrant women do not consider their situation violent. Leaving their spouse does not seem to be a choice immigrant women readily make. They fear the repercussions of such a choice and think they will never be able to return to their country of origin. Even though they live far from their country of origin, family influence is powerful. They are very attached to their traditional values. Divorce can be viewed as loss of social status and can lead to loss of their children. These actions have multiple effects. Women hesitate to seek the services

of a cultural interpreter or to initiate proceedings against their violent spouse.

- In some cultural communities it is difficult to deal openly with domestic violence and sexual assault. It is therefore more difficult to introduce awareness programs. It takes time to establish an atmosphere of trust. Our approach must incorporate these factors, hence the importance of knowing the clientele.

## Discrimination

- Too many Francophone women hesitate to request French language services. They think they are inexistent or they do not wish to appear difficult, especially when they find themselves in a completely Anglophone system. It is even more difficult for immigrant women.
- Immigrant women have greater difficulty finding subsidized housing, and often, space in women's shelters, forcing them to seek temporary shelter for periods of up to over a year. This is unacceptable because these women, as well as lacking a roof over their heads, do not receive services to which they have the right. These places are not safe, violent incidents often occur. In some cases, women had their children placed with CAS because some of these shelters do not accept children. These situations result in serious consequences for the women and the children. *“What is most distressing is that what was meant to be a temporary measure becomes a way of life”* – said the worker who reported these facts and who wonders whether there is discrimination against certain groups.



*“Why do immigrant women who are members of a visible minority stay so long in city shelters?”*

- The shortage of Francophone personnel in Anglophone agencies – inconsistent bilingualism levels.
- Women do not know their rights, especially immigrant women, who, for the most part are very poor



*“Each week is a challenge. We have to sit on committees in order to make progress on certain issues. It is very demanding to fight to defend the rights of women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.”*

The support workers also say that client diversity is not represented in most agencies, therefore women feel isolated in addition to not benefiting from an approach that is adapted to their culture. Other Anglophone and Francophone workers who work in city shelters offered these same criticisms.

- Lesbians who are victims of violence hesitate to seek services. Often they do not feel respected but judged because of their sexual orientation, especially in rural areas.
- Women are doubly penalized when they go to live with family members or with friends. They are not considered a priority case and there is no possibility of subsidized housing for them. On the other hand, in many cases, they become a burden to their families. They often feel their family judges them because they do not understand the issue of domestic violence or sexual assault. When the family support network replaces public services, the women are doubly disadvantaged. They should not be penalized for choices that are often dictated by the serious shortage of social housing units and shelter space.
- If, when they first contact police, women have the misfortune of not being well received, they hesitate to continue the process because they feel too humiliated and judged. This was mentioned numerous times.

## **Racism**

- Immigrant women from visible minorities are victims of subtle and overt racism at various levels.
- Tendency for ghettoization of some ethno cultural communities through subsidized housing allocations.
- Immigrant women from visible minorities are not always informed of their rights when they apply for various support services, notably Ontario Works
- Women from visible minorities often hesitate to report violence because they fear being misunderstood and judged by police officers. Sometimes certain persons are prejudiced against

certain communities. This type of behaviour makes it more difficult for the women to proceed. It is often only when violence becomes visible through marks on her body that the woman seeks assistance.

- Some women receive little information from police officers; they are not referred to the proper services, but they are the first persons the women meet.

We wish to mention how in the course of this research we were surprised to what extent in the City of Ottawa racism and discrimination against certain groups in particular is subtle and cannot be easily detected. In other countries hateful graffiti can be found on city walls or in subways, but it is not the case here; it would not be acceptable. However when we examine the situation more closely and when we speak with persons to find out their opinion on such subjects as immigration, we detect a great deal of prejudice and stereotypes. Immigrant women of visible minorities are very conscious of this and often they are discouraged because their vision of Canada before arriving does not correspond to their present reality. Racism against some groups of immigrant women is difficult for women because they are already vulnerable and facing new challenges. This daily racism is seen in another's gaze, in small gestures, and in reflections spoken thoughtlessly that make life unpleasant and make women feel devalued. In the system, there is prejudice against certain groups of persons. Equal opportunities are not given to all women. One community can be singled out and undesirable characteristics can be attributed to this community. Women seeking housing claim they are often refused because of the colour of their skin. Some support workers reiterate these facts and when they have the opportunity, they denounce the racism their clients face. Franco-Ontarian women feel discriminated against because they are Francophone and their culture and language is not always recognized. We noted that some persons consider the French reality of secondary importance and that, because there is an Anglophone majority in the province, it is not necessary to serve women in this country's other official language. Even though this situation is fortunately not the case everywhere, French complicates things for organizations and persons. Some recommend that it would be easier if there were only one language, English. Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, especially those who are less educated, have neither the tools nor the means to defend themselves and to claim what is their right. Many women we met told us they suffer tremendously in this regard.

Perception or reality? Why this behaviour when Canadian society regards itself as tolerant. Saying that society is tolerant, is this not differentiating between them and us and relegating them to an inferior position? This is not the place for a philosophical essay, but these questions should be addressed in order to correct this unacceptable social phenomenon.

A worker in a City of Ottawa shelter made the following comment:



*"I find it hard to believe some immigrant women, sometimes I sense that they are lying, they have nothing in their country and they think that by coming here, the system will give them everything."*

When this worker made this comment, we took time to verify her statement, making sure we understood what she had said, and she said yes she truly believes this, and in addition, she is not the only person who is of this opinion. How can immigrant women be served respectfully in such conditions?

We must not forget that women in difficult situations must be treated in a dignified and respectful manner. Our society cannot accept these types of remarks and behaviours and they should be denounced.

## **Legal Custody**

Bill C-22 on reforming *The Divorce Act* raises questions not only for women who are victims of violence but also for groups that defend women's rights. Andrée Côté and Pamela Cross did a preliminary analysis of Bill C-22 (died on the Order Paper at the end of 2003) for the Ontario Women's Network on Child Custody and Access. According to this analysis, the bill proposed changes to parental roles after divorce. The government speaks of eliminating the concepts of "custody" and "access" and replacing them with "parental responsibility", "parenting time" and "parenting order". Even though the bill specifically refers to family violence and the need to provide for children's safety and that of "other family members", these references are gender neutral and do not specifically refer to violence against women or to the equality interests of women in family law.

If a new bill is introduced that retains the same recommendations as Bill C-22, how will the rights of women and children to safety be protected?

The proposed elimination of the notions of custody and access will intensify the difficulties with international treaties that still use these expressions. This is the case with the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (Hague Convention), where the term "access" is used and not "parenting time".<sup>7</sup>

Another troublesome aspect of the reform is that it seems to presume that unless there is an order to the contrary, two parents who have parenting time are considered to have joint custody, regardless of the amount of this time or the nature of their decision-making responsibilities. It is another obstacle to the already difficult task of getting tribunals and government to intervene in

---

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please consult the Ontario Women's Justice Network website at [www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)

international abductions. In addition, often (but not exclusively) it is immigrant women who live the trauma of an international abduction of their children. This measure could therefore exacerbate their already difficult situation.

Women's rights groups will continue to make recommendations to the Department of Justice and to the government so that the lives of women who are victims of domestic violence will not be adversely affected by the reform of the *Divorce Act*.<sup>8</sup>

## Poverty

- Reduction in social assistance payments by 21 % since 1995 has led to poverty for women recipients.
- Support workers are confronted daily with the poverty of their clients. Despite this poverty, women wish to retain their dignity while they depend on social assistance. Many women after they leave shelters must depend on food banks each week.

In one area of Ottawa served by a community resource center, there are 3000 subsidized housing units. Each month this center provides food to 800 families while receiving more than 2000 requests to which they cannot respond.

- Poverty has serious consequences on many levels: the health of women and their children, increased stress that often leads to violence, children's performance at school.



*"It is a vicious circle, and it is often unclear how families will manage".*

## 3.5.3 Proposed Measures

---

- 41.** New funding for agencies to implement French language services – no new money since 1991.
- 42.** Review service funding criteria.

---

<sup>8</sup> See the NAWL/ANFD website: [www.nawl.ca](http://www.nawl.ca)

- 43.** Increase the visibility of existing services by creating opportunities to promote these services in the community, but also to learn about services offered by other agencies. Support workers could participate in turn.
- 44.** Make the Comité Réseau a permanent service that through a coordinator would link available resources and would continue the work of analyzing and evaluating the issues facing women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- 45.** Hire staff where needed.
- 46.** Establish a calendar of all City of Ottawa groups and resources and distribute it in the community.
- 47.** Organize a day of reflection and training on networking (open to all) to make the services known and to welcome new persons.
- 48.** “Some fathers” are claiming that violence by women is underestimated in the reform of the Divorce Act. Through research or other means, correct this misinformation because this minimizes violence against women. Find ways for women to work together to oppose these myths.
- 49.** Promote awareness of Francophone women’s needs among Anglophone support workers. – If a woman does not request services in French, it is not because she does not wish to receive them or that she does not need them. Often she does not know that French language services are available.
- 50.** Promote awareness of diversity in Ottawa Police Services – Lesbian women, women with a handicap. Women are still confronted by too many prejudices.
- 51.** Offer better access to justice.
- 52.** Better service coordination.
- 53.** Offer multicultural training for agency personnel.
- 54.** Have personnel reflecting cultural diversity where necessary.
- 55.** Obtain funds for publishing information brochures in French. Funds are presently limited; after three months, some support workers have no material left to distribute in the community.

56. Develop outreach services in various communities and in other areas serving women who are victims of violence: doctors, health professionals, social workers in schools and others.
57. More Francophone lawyers, more judges, increase the number of hours of lawyers who accept legal aid certificates.
58. Allow women to use systems in place in situations where they are abused by the system that is supposed to help them.

A lawyer made this observation :



*“Some of the abuse reported in this action-research project is unworthy of a democratic society that upholds the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”*

## 3.6 Anglophone Support Workers

### 3.6.1 General Observations

Presently there are only two Francophone women’s shelters in the Ottawa Region, Maison d’amitié and La Présence. A third shelter will open soon. Maison d’amitié has received funding to construct the new home.

La Présence is administered by a religious congregation. Although many women, especially young women, find shelter there, la Présence does not participate at round table meetings where participants study ways to end violence against women, so it functions somewhat outside the network.

The other women’s shelters are Anglophone. Most of them are not designated as bilingual.

Some Anglophone support workers are sensitive to the needs of Francophone women and immigrant women who speak French who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. They are aware of the additional obstacles these women face when they approach services. Anglophone support workers who work in a so-called bilingual system must overcome many obstacles so that Francophone clients receive the same level of service as Anglophone women who are victims of sexist violence. Francophone support workers who work in an

Anglophone environment also face numerous challenges, personally and with their clients.

The support workers we interviewed all work in the support network for women who are victims of violence. Only two of the Anglophone support workers spoke impeccable French, one other understood fairly well, but the rest spoke little or no French. These support workers, however, deal on a daily basis with Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women.

## 3.6.2 Obstacles

---

### Women's Shelters

- Shortage of shelter spaces
- Shortage of bilingual personnel – In most Anglophone or so-called bilingual women's shelters, there is often only one support worker who speaks French; this makes access difficult at the same time as it creates more work for the Francophone support worker. One of her additional responsibilities is document translation although she is not a translator; this could cause problems especially in the case of legal documents.
- When Francophone support workers approach other organizations, they have to write letters of support in English in order that their clients can be served more quickly. This often leads to support workers having to assume responsibilities that are not part of their job description, leaving less time for direct service.
- Interpretation creates many problems for support workers and service users. The presence of an interpreter changes the dynamic of a meeting. A bond is formed between the woman and the interpreter instead of between the woman and the support worker. Support workers often have the impression that much is lost of the lived experience of the client because the interpretation is inadequate; some of the important elements of the women's lived experience are minimized.
- Interpretation services are not always available when needed. Support workers respond to crises daily and often it is difficult to respond to the immediate needs of a client. The waiting period is often trying for women.

We recognize that some immigrant women whose second language is French do not always wish to obtain the services of an interpreter of their country of origin, but it is easier to obtain the services of an interpreter from ethno cultural communities than those of a Francophone interpreter. It is important to respect the client's choice but it does create problems.

- Some clients do not understand the notion of confidentiality. Clients come from dictatorships and corrupt countries. The women find it hard to believe that their disclosures are protected; for these reasons among others, support workers need more time with immigrant women. Time is limited. In this sense, these clients are short-changed compared with Anglophone women.
- Francophone women do not participate in groups because discussions are in English.
- Francophone children who stay in Anglophone women's shelters receive few services even if partnerships exist that offer some Francophone resources. Often the childcare worker does not speak French; children find themselves isolated and are not able to benefit from the support they need.
- Support workers recognize that in many women's shelters, staff do not represent the cultural diversity of the clientele.

In an Ottawa shelter where 50 % of clients are from Sub-Saharan Africa, all of the support workers are native to Canada. Some support workers say there is a lot of work to be done at this level to change mentalities and to have the personnel representative of the cultural diversity of the clientele they serve.

- Support workers state that when women arrive from some City of Ottawa shelters they have not been informed of their rights during their stay, thus causing some delay in their process.
- Support workers have little French language documentation at their disposal. Most of the information posted is in English.

Support workers ask themselves why Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women are not informed of their rights. Some believe that discrimination and racism exists against certain groups whereas others are not yet certain of this.



*“In my opinion, Francophone women receive fewer services than Anglophone women.”*



*“To be honest with you, in our agency, Anglophone women are better served. I have been working here for more than 10 years, I am not worried about losing my job. As an organization, we are aware of the problems, we have named these problems many times. I don't speak French. I am convinced that when I leave my job my boss will try to hire someone who speaks French”  
(original English reference)*



*“I want to give an example – In our shelter, we can welcome 16 persons. Presently we have seven women who are originally from Sub-Saharan Africa and whose second language is French, six women whose first language is English, one aboriginal woman, one women of a visible minority born in Canada, and one vacancy. We only have one support worker who speaks French and she is leaving us this summer. It is obvious that the needs of French speaking immigrant women are not being served.”*

These comments illustrate the reality of most Anglophone agencies and reflect the obstacles listed by service users, Francophone support workers and agency directors.

## City of Ottawa Shelters

Even though the City of Ottawa affirms that it offers services in Canada's two official languages, we observe that in practice there is a different reality. In some shelters, we can say that French language services are practically non-existent, and are not always a management priority.

More and more French-speaking immigrant women who are victims of violence live in these shelters.

Some Anglophone workers working in these places had the courage to speak openly about what happens in these shelters. In fact they broke certain taboos because relationships between Anglophone and Francophone workers are not always simple. Even though all the workers work for the same cause, the political issues create a difficult atmosphere between the various agencies, which affects Francophone women who are victims of violence.

- Few or no French language services.

- City shelter clients have many problems (homelessness, mental health, various addictions). This situation is difficult for women who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault because the city shelter is not a safe place where they can recover. In some shelters, children are not admitted, so the mothers must place their children with family members in the best-case scenario or temporarily with the Children's Aid Society.



*“In one of the City of Ottawa shelters, 15 to 20 % of Francophone and French- speaking immigrant women should be in a women’s shelter rather than here. They are here because there is a great shortage of spaces and we know we are not equipped to respond to their needs.”*

- Women are not always informed of their rights or of existing resources. They do not have the support required to take all the necessary steps to leave the shelter in order to return to a somewhat normal life.
- Some workers mentioned that no distinction is made between women who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault and women who have problems with addictions. Living together in a shelter can create numerous problems, making life difficult for residents.
- Some workers find it unfortunate that it is difficult to place immigrant women from city shelters in women’s shelters. One worker said that in her ten years working in city shelters, she had succeeded in placing women who are victims of violence in women’s shelters only seven times, a small number compared with the number of women she deals with in a year.

This worker said that her only explanation for this situation is the fact that there is a shortage of beds in Ottawa. We should examine this more closely because the clientele in question is made up of immigrant women who live below the poverty line.



*“Our clientele has greatly changed in the last ten years. A great number of women who spend time in our shelters have experienced torture in their lives; they suffered terribly before arriving in Canada. We should make the effort to understand the circumstances they lived before they arrived. Sometimes we lack historical and geopolitical knowledge. In addition to dealing with the obstacles our clients face, we should also examine our own barriers; it is often very difficult.”*

- Some workers are of the opinion that women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault stay too long in city shelters because it takes a long time to find subsidized housing. They are also of the opinion that there is discrimination against immigrant women. The workers question the way that housing is allocated in Ottawa. One group of immigrant women, namely city shelter clients who are poor, find it difficult to obtain housing. When they succeed, the accommodation is often badly in need of repair. When a woman visits a place belonging to one of the City of Ottawa partners, most of the time she will not obtain this accommodation. This type of situation was mentioned by workers but also by service users who find it difficult not to interpret this behaviour as racism against immigrant women.
- Immigrant women are often sent outside the city where there are no Francophone personnel or personnel reflective of cultural diversity. The women do not receive many services and are very isolated. They will often choose to return to their violent spouse.
- Workers often ask residents to interpret. This is not the ideal situation especially considering the need for confidentiality.
- Shortage of Francophone interpreters – It is easier to find an ethno cultural interpreter than a Francophone interpreter. Sometimes other agencies are contacted by telephone to provide translation over the phone in order to assist their client as quickly as possible.
- In some city shelters, there is a shortage of space for individual meetings with clients who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Staff members sometimes provide counselling in an open area, where clients do not feel comfortable. In this context, it is difficult to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality.



*“The lack of confidentiality I experience during my interviews borders on disrespect.”*



*“No one should knock on the door when I am with a woman who has just been raped, this is unacceptable.”*

In another city shelter, a worker told us she deals with five nuclear families and 16 single parent families of which ten are women refugees whose second language is French. Because she is the only Francophone staff member, much of the workload falls to her.

If there were no Francophone workers at this city shelter, what would happen to these women?

## Ontario Works



*“As workers, we are often frustrated with the system. Too often we have to fight for our client’s rights. These situations complicate things for us and are difficult for us.”*



*“The procedures women must follow to get social assistance can be very intimidating. The system opens up the personal lives of women through the requirement to verify many personal documents. Ontario Works has access to income tax files and credit searches. These measures were imposed by the Conservative government.”*

- Social assistance payments have diminished by 21 % since 1995. Today a single woman receives \$520 per month, which is allocated as follows: \$325 for rent and \$195 for food and other basic necessities. Before the 1995 cuts, a single woman received \$649 monthly. A woman with one child presently receives \$997 per month, plus \$207 federal allowance. Ontario Works recovers \$102, leaving a woman and a child with \$1,102 per month. Because of this, single women and women who are single parents remain in the poverty cycle.
- Some workers have preconceived notions about ethno cultural groups. Racism concerns them.
- Some workers lack training regarding the issue of violence against women and its consequences. These persons have not received training in many years. This lack of training and knowledge results in clients not always being adequately served.
- Some workers do not always inform their clients of their rights.

One worker reported :



*“There have been many instances of pregnant immigrant women not being informed that they could receive more money because of their pregnancy. These are not isolated cases.”*

### 3.6.3 Proposed Measures

---

59. Facilitate and encourage designation in virtue of the 1986 *French Language Services Act*.
60. Encourage agency personnel to learn French and encourage training where it is needed.
61. Encourage and create partnerships with French language service agencies.
62. Develop French language services in the Southern and Western sectors of the city.
63. Offer appropriate services to women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who are obliged to stay in city shelters because of shortage of space in women’s shelters and because of the lack of subsidized housing.
64. Increase the number of spaces in women’s shelters.
65. Facilitate access to subsidized housing; make the process equitable and free from discrimination.
66. Denounce racism and change systems in order to improve the lives of immigrant women and to foster a spirit of harmony among cultures.
67. Improve access to legal aid in order that women are defended with respect and with equal benefit of the law as stated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
68. Build additional social housing. The government of Ontario should take significant measures to remedy the lack of subsidized housing.

69. Have more documentation in French. Create a translation agency for the entire network. This measure would facilitate service access for women and collaboration between agencies.
70. Train personnel from various institutions regarding the issue of domestic violence, especially sexual assault and cultural diversity.
71. Train personnel from various institutions (police, judges, lawyers, etc.) about the specific issues concerning refugee women, immigrants, and Francophone women.
72. The police service should establish better relationships with the Francophone community and with Ottawa's cultural communities.
73. Support workers who work with women who are victims of violence would like to participate in developing the police training curriculum at Cité collégiale in order to educate future police officers about the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. At present, the training program does not allocate much time for this topic.
74. Participate in different City of Ottawa committees in order to improve their efficiency and so that the demands of interest groups are heard. (Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, Housing Committee, etc.)
75. Housing Registry: allow women who are not ready to leave a shelter to put their application on hold without penalty. Presently, if a woman's file is put on hold for more than three months, the woman loses her priority status.
76. Where needed, in centres, provide a private space where women can be assured of safety and anonymity.
77. Abolish the Ontario Works' policy of deducting the amount of the federal government children's allowance.

## **3.7 Francophone Agency Directors**

### **3.7.1 General Observations**

---

In the course of this action-research project, we met with women's shelter directors, community resource centre directors, directors of agencies serving women who are incest survivors and sexual assault survivors, and with directors of

related agencies that work with women who are victims of violence in the City of Ottawa.

We note that there are differences depending on the location in Ottawa. Some community resource centres are well established and the Francophone nature of these centres is well defined. These centres are becoming better known in the community. Things are far from perfect however. Even though they have made progress, Francophone agencies have to fight constantly and be creative in order to ensure that they continue to serve the population.

We shall present in detail the obstacles and challenges faced by different agencies.

## 3.7.2 Obstacles

---

### Services for Women Who Are Incest Survivors and Sexual Assault Survivors

- Agency under funding – Lack of financial and human resources results in delays in service development.
- Inadequate funding formulas for sexual assault centers. Francophone agencies have the same responsibilities regarding the level of French language services they must provide to the population as do Anglophone agencies but the funds allocated to Francophone agencies are clearly lesser than those allocated to Anglophone agencies. Even though there are fewer Francophones, the 24/7 crisis line for example has the same needs (personnel, volunteer training, office space).
- Fund raising takes a lot of time and energy and the results are not guaranteed. In many agencies, one full-time position devoted to fund raising is required.
- The many taboos surrounding questions of sexual assault and incest make it more difficult to reach clientele despite the fact that more and more women dare to break their silence. Agencies working with survivors need to make themselves better known among persons affected by these issues.
- Most agencies are beginning to deal with a new type of clientele: immigrant women and refugees who have experienced armed conflicts in their country of origin. These clients arrive with a heavy

burden, and agencies are not always equipped to respond well to the specific needs of these clients<sup>9</sup>.

- Francophone women do not have access to the same services as Anglophone women for different reasons: English language services have existed for a longer time, Anglophone agencies receive greater funding, and they have more human resources, well-established volunteer programs. Anglophone agencies are able to concentrate their efforts on service development while Francophone agencies fight for funding, and thus for their survival.
- Despite their expertise and being perfectly bilingual, support workers are paid between \$5,000 and \$10,000 less than City of Ottawa personnel are. These salary inequities create many problems for agency managers who must regularly recruit and train personnel. Community organizations cannot afford to match their salary policies with those of the City of Ottawa, for example, that clearly offers much more attractive benefit packages.
- Some agencies classify themselves as bilingual, but in practice this is not so. The level of bilingualism required for Anglophones is not the same as for Francophones. The “bilingual” Anglophone support workers are not always able to communicate with their Francophone clients. When this happens, the service is of a poorer quality.
- Too many Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women do not think that being served in French is a right. They are also told that if they accept to be served in English, they will be served more quickly.

## Women’s Shelters



*“We cannot continue to build programs without investing in infrastructures. We must nourish the roots.”*

---

<sup>9</sup> The MOFIF (Mouvement ontarien des femmes immigrantes francophones) is a provincial organization. The MOFIF has just done a study entitled *L’impact du conflit armé sur l’intégration des femmes immigrantes et des réfugiées francophones en Ontario*. The report is available on the Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes website at [www.francofemmes.org/aocvf](http://www.francofemmes.org/aocvf)

The director of a City of Ottawa shelter offered these comments. Budgetary cuts have many effects.

- The 6% cuts imposed by the Conservative government in 1995 affected all agencies working with women, particularly women's shelters that despite increased demand have operated with the same budget for the last nine years. Many agencies function with a deficit of between \$50,000 and \$100,000 each year. These budget deficits not only affect managers' reputations, but they delay the necessary evolution of services for women who are victims of violence.
- Insufficient funding. Francophone agencies do not have enough money to meet the demand.
- No funds for training and management of volunteer programs.
- Due to lack of funding, some services for women and children have been reduced, for example, accompaniment to court, to hospital, to search for housing, all of which are very important. Agencies deal with women who are very vulnerable and who find it difficult to express their needs.



*"One of our clients went by herself to court. A decision was taken that was not in her best interest, and she did not know she could appeal the decision."*



*"It is difficult to conceive that some women sometimes find it difficult to take the bus."*

- Lack of personnel – It is difficult to recruit and to keep Francophone personnel.
- In one of the Ottawa women's shelters, support workers work a 40-hour week. This is too long. They should only work 38 hours. There is one support worker for nine women and their children. This is too much work for one person.
- Worker exhaustion – Of 22 employees at a women's shelter at the time we did this research, 5 were on sick leave, that is to say 22 %

of the personnel were absent. This is significant coupled with the lack of human resources in general. Worker fatigue aggravates the situation for managers and affects day-to-day operations. The quality of services offered to the residents is also affected.

- Because of the heavy workload, agencies have less time to be involved in the community, which reduces access to information. Even where there is good will on the part of the Anglophone network of groups that defend the rights of women, all the meetings take place in English, limiting participation from many agency representatives.
- Although this is not part of their mandate, some agencies must provide interpretation services for other agencies because these do not have Francophone personnel. Elsewhere, some agencies tend to think that immigrant women speak English when often their second language is French.
- Despite some recognition, we note that French language services are not always considered an acquired right and we must still fight for recognition of this right. The needs of Francophone women with their diverse cultural backgrounds are a reality.
- Shortage of space in women's shelters – Presently the minimum stay is three months. This is a direct result of the shortage of affordable housing and longer waiting periods for subsidized housing. To reiterate, in some City of Ottawa shelters, immigrant women often stay more than a year, which is unacceptable.
- Because of the shortage of space, the management of some women's shelters has had to establish new admission criteria and because a primary criterion is women's and children's safety, more questions are asked than in the past (for example, is the aggressor living in the city)



*“It is very difficult as a director working with a feminist perspective to have to ask all these questions of women who have been victims of violence, but the present shortage of spaces obliges us to establish these new criteria.”*

- Because of lack of space in different resources, some women are housed in hotels where they do not receive the services they need. It is easier to trace women to hotels than to a women's shelter; this could put their safety and that of their children at risk.

- Immigrant women still hesitate to denounce violence because they fear retaliation from their ex-partner and from their family. Immigrant clientele is less aware of the issue of violence. Much consciousness-raising must be done in this regard.
- Because of the anonymous nature of women's shelters, women are not always aware of their existence. Women also fear taking this step.
- Racism is very present in the system.
- Cohabitation of "white" women and women who are from visible minorities and immigrant women often creates problems. "White" women think that immigrant women receive more services.
- Ethnocentricity – When women from different ethnic groups or rival clans in their country of origin live together, serious problems can occur. Sometimes clan rivalries are perpetuated in Canada. Personnel are not always equipped to resolve these problems or they do not understand them.
- Changing clientele – In many Ottawa women's shelters, immigrant women can represent between 50 to 85 % of the women. This change creates new challenges for management and staff.
- The system often has doubts about the women's lived experience and accusations.
- Difficult to obtain the services of a Francophone interpreter. We observe that it is easier to find an interpreter from the ethno cultural communities than a Francophone interpreter.

## Immigration

Presently we are seeing a new type of clientele, women "without status". These women arrived in Canada with diplomatic status. For whatever reason, but often because of serious abuse, they flee the embassy and find themselves here illegally. Often the abusive employer does not return traveling documents to the woman resulting in her loss of status.

- These situations are very complex because a case must be made. It is difficult to find lawyers who are both competent and available to take the time to work with this clientele. These women live with insecurity that has a destabilizing effect, in addition to the effects created by the length of these procedures. Success with these types of cases requires time and expertise. In many cases, the women do

not understand their status or the consequences of the procedures for their life and their future. Hopelessness can often make women to do things they might regret.

- More and more workers arrive in Canada with status as domestics<sup>10</sup>. Those who are assaulted by their employer seek refuge in women's shelters.
- Women who arrive in Canada on a visitor's visa and who, for different reasons do not wish to return to their country of origin. Immigration regulations concerning change of status are very strict and limited.
- For immigrant women, one of the most difficult steps they face is dealing with questions pertaining to their application for refugee status



*"We are presently dealing with a woman from Sub-Saharan Africa who was refused refugee status. We will submit an application "on humanitarian grounds", but the lawyer does not speak French and the client does not speak English. We see how difficult it is for the woman to understand what is happening and why refugee status was refused. We must spend much time with this new clientele to help them understand the issues associated with this type of situation."*

## Community Resource Centres

The question of accessibility of French language services in community resource centres depends for the most part on the city district in which the centre is located. Most of the staff of these centres is Francophone and they speak perfect English. This is an advantage over Anglophone agencies where generally staff speaks only English. Some centres are well established in their district and for these, word of mouth works very well. The success of a centre is also dependent on management's willingness to defend Francophone rights by political lobbying for the right of Francophones to be served in their own language.

Many obstacles remain and the budget cuts by the Conservative government in 1995 had negative repercussions on agencies that continue to be obliged to do more with less money. The directors recognize the increasing poverty of their clientele. The 21 % cuts to social assistance payments are dramatic considering an already restricted family budget.

---

<sup>10</sup> Immigration law regarding domestic workers is discriminatory because woman can only be associated with one employer. When they are mistreated by their employer, women hesitate to take action out of fear of being sent back to their country of origin.

Community resource centres mainly serve Franco-Ontarian clients with minimal education who live below the poverty line in subsidized housing. These persons often rely on food banks. With immigrant women, education levels can vary greatly. We encounter women who have a university education while others can hardly read and write. Despite their advanced education, immigrant women cannot always find work for which they are qualified and experienced.



*"I often meet immigrant women who speak better French than me, who have doctorates; I see all the difficulties they face daily. It is even more difficult because they have so much to offer."*

- Budget cuts – Centres must do more with less money. In order to remain within budget, difficult choices must be made.
- There are funding disparities between Anglophone and Francophone agencies, which makes service provision more difficult.
- Some agencies lack visibility because of the lack of funds. Contact with Francophone clientele is not made in the same manner as Anglophone clients.
- French language service development is delayed because of insufficient funding.
- Funding sources do not always have realistic requirements.
- Many agencies have difficulties with personnel – Turnover is high because agencies do not have the means to offer salaries comparable to those of government workers. Staff members try to obtain employment with the Public Service or the municipality because salaries and benefits are superior. Having to regularly train new staff affects service quality, and managers must put more effort into continually hiring new personnel.
- The pay equity program is about twenty years behind schedule. Employees at community resource centres earn on average \$10,000 less than Ontario Works personnel, for example. To rectify the situation a large sum of money is necessary. A support worker's job is very exhausting and difficult. Many social workers have a master's degree in social work. What is the base salary for anyone with a master's degree in any ministry?



*“In such conditions, how can we maintain the continuity of French language services when we cannot even recruit Francophone personnel?”*

- It is more and more difficult to recruit Francophone support workers.
- Linguistic requirements are very demanding for Francophone support workers compared with requirements for Anglophone workers.
- Despite their good will, some support workers do not always understand the issues and challenges that immigrant women face. Staff training is essential.
- Despite budget cuts, some centres have maintained a range of services but lack personnel to offer the services. This increases the support workers' workload and obliges them to sacrifice other aspects of their job.
- The waiting period for French language support groups (4 to 6 months) in some centres is a serious obstacle for women who turn to English language services when they can.
- Francophone women still hesitate to request to be served in French. Because of interiorized oppression, some do not value their mother tongue and lack self-confidence.
- Cohabitation of Franco-Ontarian and immigrant women in subsidized housing complexes sometimes causes serious problems. Canadian born women often feel immigrant families are taking something from them. This creates tension between these different groups.
- Some centres find it more difficult to make contact with immigrant women affected by violence. A centre was able to reach immigrant women who otherwise would not have approached them through children's programs such as homework clubs 100 % attended by children from immigrant families. Creativity is required.
- Immigrant women do not always define violence as such and remain isolated.
- Immigrant women are too often sent to city shelters that are inappropriate for their needs. They receive too few services and find themselves even more isolated.

- Cooperation between the different agencies and some institutions is sometimes very difficult.
- Centres deal more and more with clients with mental health problems; this situation has worsened since 1995. Persons who were functional in the past because they received care are no longer. Hospitals refer more and more persons who require close supervision.



*"I ask myself the question: which institutions have the money?"*

- Lack of resources in the schools.



*"When you visit a school you see the extent of the problem of violence and poverty, nevertheless, there are insufficient resources for assisting young people. Often the social worker is in the school only a few hours a week, which is far from sufficient."*

### 3.7.3 Proposed Measures

---

78. Recognition of the rights of French language services by provincial and municipal governments, but also in the community at large.
79. Women's shelters should be funded based on needs identified by agencies.
80. Hire more Francophone personnel in so-called bilingual agencies.
81. Decrease the workweek to 38 hours in women's shelters.
82. Prioritize our commitment to Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF), which represents agencies working with Francophone women in Ontario who are victims of violence.
83. Implement systems that allow women to denounce abuse by the system to which they are victim.

- 84.** Develop French language services to respond more adequately to the diverse needs of new clientele.
- 85.** Non-Francophone women's shelters should offer more services in French.
- 86.** Establish a community development program and an awareness program on issues of violence against women and with a particular focus on French-speaking immigrant women.
- 87.** Hire more Francophone interpreters.
- 88.** Open a new Francophone shelter and a day centre for women who are victims of violence.
- 89.** Improve access to legal aid.
- 90.** Revise the *Immigration Act* to facilitate immigration procedures.
- 91.** Establish partnerships with other agencies that work with women who are victims of violence.
- 92.** Inject funds into centres to develop services (outreach services, publicity, programs for children who witness violence).
- 93.** Hire personnel and offer on-going training.
- 94.** More flexible programs and service hours.
- 95.** Remind women that French language services are a right, that they exist and encourage them to request these services.
- 96.** Invest in more French resources such as manuals, reference books because most tools are only available in English.
- 97.** Establish a centre for document translation; once translated the documents would be distributed to agencies in the network.
- 98.** Put money back into programs for preventing violence against young persons.

## 3.8 Anglophone Agency Directors

### 3.8.1 General Observations

---

Anglophone agency directors with whom we met individually or who answered the questionnaire work in women's shelters, community resource centres, sexual assault centres, resource centres for immigrant women.

Despite the continued increase in number of Francophone clients and French-speaking immigrant women, most of these agencies are not designated in virtue of the *1986 French Language Services Act*. Some agency directors stated that the designation process was too complicated and would cause problems for their agency. Two of these agencies are seeking designation. The others do not plan to do so.

Some participants recognize that they do not have the capacity to equitably serve Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women because they do not have Francophone personnel in their agency. If they do have Francophone staff, often there is only one, who is overworked and not able to adequately respond to the needs of all the women.

### 3.8.2 Obstacles

---

Some directors identified the same obstacles as Francophone directors. Others in non-designated agencies say that they do not have policies concerning French-language services and refer Francophone clients to French language resources or they simply serve them in English.

### 3.8.3 Proposed Measures

---

99. Simplify agency designation procedures.
100. Hire Francophone personnel and personnel that is representative of clients' cultural diversity.
101. Women should be referred on a more consistent basis to appropriate services.

## 3.9 Workers from Related Agencies

### 3.9.1 General Observations

---

We met with workers from the Children's Aid Society, the Ottawa Police and Ontario Works, and with family law lawyers. These meetings allowed us to confirm the obstacles faced by the many participants in this action-research project.

### 3.9.2 Obstacles

---

The first obstacle was making an appointment. It seems difficult for workers in related agencies to speak about obstacles that exist in their respective agencies. Revealing certain information could be poorly viewed and have repercussions on the worker. The goal of the meetings was to confirm and validate the information gathered in the course of the action-research project.

To give an example, presently Ontario Works has 320 workers and deals with 20,000 cases. These figures indicate on the one hand that each worker has a large caseload and on the other hand that a great number of Ottawa residents live in poverty.

One of the persons we interviewed told us that 50 % of her clients were Francophone and that she does not speak French. The other 50 % are cases involving aboriginal women, immigrant women and refugee women.

#### Ontario Works

- The system that should be assisting Franco-Ontarian women does not always respect them. Franco-Ontarian women often live below the poverty line and their lack of education limits them. They are not aware of their rights and often they are not informed of them. They have a very low self-esteem. Few services are available and adapted to their needs. Some clients have various problems: multiple addictions, health problems. The problems are more serious in the 30-40 year age group. Some of the women are bilingual, which explains in part why they do not insist on French language services. Even though Ontario Works policy allows a client to be served by a Francophone worker, in practice this does not always occur and there can be a long wait.

Regarding immigrant women, the following obstacles were named:



*“We tend to send immigrant women to the worst locations, in violent areas of the city, where there are few resources. In the process, children are neglected. They have a right to safe housing and to relationships with other children. These living conditions create instability in the children’s lives and can result in integration problems in the long term.”*



*“I clearly see the situation.” (Original English quotation)*

- Shortage of space in women’s shelters and in City of Ottawa shelters.
- Because of the shortage of space in women’s shelters and city shelters, and because of the lack of safe, affordable housing, women turn in circles. After a year or two, they find themselves back where they started and nothing has improved.
- Racism is a reality in our institution. Clients are very aware of this and it is painful to witness each day. Immigrant women had a more positive image of Canadian society before their arrival in Canada.
- Aboriginal women live in extreme poverty; their needs are not met. However they ask for nothing more than they are given, which is the minimum. The prejudice and discrimination they face are unfortunately deeply rooted in the system.
- The clientele has changed radically in the last few years. Through our contacts with women who come to us for service, we can follow world events. Women arrive directly from countries experiencing armed conflicts and wars; often they have been affected directly by these conflicts.

More and more women working as domestics and women who came to Canada with diplomatic status are fleeing severe abuse. New policies were implemented at the end of 2003 to deal with the emergency needs of this new clientele who previously were not eligible to receive services from Ontario Works. These are very complex situations which require a great deal of work and which make women vulnerable.



*“I am presently dealing with very difficult cases. I have a client who left her country in a period of armed conflict with only two of her children. Her husband had been killed. Three children are remaining in her country. For the past few years she has been trying to bring them to Canada... The process of reunification of families is just too long. Mothers and children can be separated for many years and these situations are unbearable.” (Original English quotation)*

- Immigrant women’s standard of living has decreased in the last few years.
- We do not have enough staff members who speak French or personnel representative of client diversity.

## Francophone lawyers

We met with Francophone lawyers. One lawyer’s clientele is made up of 95% Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women who receive legal aid.

The problems described by these lawyers are at all levels of the present system. Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women must overcome monumental barriers in order to be represented in a fair and just manner. According to them, it is already difficult for Anglophone women who are victims of domestic violence. One might thus imagine the difficulties facing disadvantaged Francophone women.

- By right, French language services are guaranteed for anyone who requests them. In practice, things are different. A Francophone woman can request French language services. She must however be patient because there are excessively long waits; sometimes the process takes twice as long. Even though there are many lawyers who interview their clients in French, they prefer English for the legal proceedings.
- For many lawyers, violence against women is a secondary matter and they are uncomfortable dealing with this issue.
- Legal aid resources – A lawyer is given 14 hours to prepare a file, if custody of the children is not at issue, 15 extra hours if there is question of custody of the children and 8 hours for a restraining order.

This number of hours allocated by legal aid is in itself a barrier. Lawyers have few hours in which to adequately process a file. Time is needed to listen to clients and

to prepare documents. Husbands often have more income; they can lengthen the process by “playing games”. This behaviour infringes on the already limited time available to lawyers for defending their clients. Defending women in such conditions is a challenge and requires great commitment.

One of the lawyers we met reflected :



*“Defending women in our system is a somewhat of a vocation.”*

- French speaking immigrant women are not familiar with the Canadian judicial system. They are not convinced they will be heard and properly defended. They often feel as though institutions, CAS, Ontario Works and other services have scrutinized their lives. According to one of the lawyers interviewed, immigrant women are not convinced that their testimony remains confidential.
- Shortage of Francophone lawyers – Most of them were educated in English. They learned all the legal terms in English. It is easier for them to work in English than to begin explaining things in French to their client, especially since juridical language is very complex.
- Shortage of Francophone or bilingual judges in courts but also in administrative tribunals like those of Ontario Works.
- Sometimes the spouse’s lawyer pressures the women, contacting her at the women’s shelter or city shelter. This happens most often to immigrant women who are not aware of their rights, who fear the system and who are isolated.

We note that according to the regulations, a lawyer does not have the right to communicate with the opposing party. These actions are unacceptable and contravene the Bar Association professional code of ethics.

- Cross-examination can be very intimidating for women who often feel revictimized by this procedure. Judges will not intervene if questions remain within acceptable limits. Note that there is often a fine line. It does happen though that a judge will intervene when boundaries are overstepped. In these situations, the woman’s lawyer plays an important role. Unfortunately many new and

inexperienced lawyers accept legal certificates and the court becomes their training ground at the women's' expense.

This type of situation lessens the possibility of a fair defence for the women.

- The lack of coordination between services results in women “*running around like chickens with their head cut off*”, as described by one lawyer. Women are not always informed of their rights, notably at Ontario Works. The Children's Aid Society, without regard for language and culture, can arbitrarily place children.
- In some communities, racism and prejudice are very evident.

## Anglophone Lawyers

The many deficiencies they describe are the same as those recorded in meetings with Francophone lawyers. Nevertheless, we find it important to reiterate some essential points.

- Systemic racism



*“Many women of colour tell us that the colour of their skin is an obstacle when they seek services. Being a “white” woman I find this difficult to imagine because Canada is a multicultural society.”*

The shortage of Francophone judges and lawyers makes women feel insecure even when interpretation services are available. They sense that they are not being defended fairly, in addition to feeling that they are missing something in the process.

- Violence against women remains a taboo subject that lawyers prefer not to broach.
- Despite the surplus of funds for legal aid, too many women are unable to access these services.
- Difficult to find a Francophone lawyer willing to accept a legal aid certificate.
- Aboriginal women are very poorly treated by the different services that should be assisting them.

- During cross-examinations, women say they are intimidated by the opposing party's lawyer. This situation can be even more serious for immigrant women who are not familiar with the Canadian system and who face additional barriers: language, poverty, fear of judgement, racism.

## **Children's Aid Society (CAS)**

Placing one or more children is a traumatic experience for children as well as for their mothers who must leave them. These decisions cannot be taken lightly. Do we always evaluate the impact these placements have on the lives of the children and their mother? Do we always make an informed choice free of prejudice? A mother whose child is placed by the CAS can propose that her child be placed with a member of her family. The Children's Aid Society will then ensure that this family member conforms to CAS requirements.

In the last 20 years, the Ottawa CAS has seen an increase in number of clients, from 600 to 1100 children.

According to the Francophone workers with whom we met, a significant number of Children's Aid Society cases involve domestic violence. The barriers and deficiencies discussed with some workers are as follows:

- When the child is removed from the mother because of domestic violence, she is revictimized because the system makes her responsible for the safety of her children.
- If a woman returns to live with her violent ex-spouse CAS policy is that the woman is obliged to remove her children from the home.
- Some lack of understanding on the part of agencies that work with women who are victims of violence and the CAS regarding their respective mandates.
- When there is a shortage of foster homes, Francophone children are placed in Anglophone homes. Because of the shortage of foster homes, children are placed where there is space and unfortunately culture, language and religion cannot always be taken into account.

This last point illustrates one worker's reflections. She says, "*It was very difficult to place many children from the same family.*" Even by separating them it was very difficult to find spaces. In one week, these children moved several times. We try to keep children in the same school in order not to disrupt them too much, but in practice, it is a different story. These circumstances are traumatic for children who have already suffered so much.

- Because of a shortage of foster homes, criteria and requirements are less demanding. This can be traumatic for the children who are placed. There have been instances of abuse. According to one worker, some foster homes should be closed.
- There is still much prejudice against some cultures. Personnel do not always reflect the diversity of the clientele served by the Children's Aid Society. Women are judged subjectively by the worker who deals with them and according to their limits.



*“Sometimes before the situation is understood, a judgement is made about the woman who is a victim of violence.”*

- Racism is a concrete reality in our institution.
- For Franco-Ontarian women, there is discrimination based on language rather than on racism.

## **Ottawa Police**

The police officer is often the first person a woman who is a victim of violence meets. Some participants in the action-research project described numerous obstacles that are mentioned in this report. We did not doubt the information we received in the course of this project, but we thought it would be important to meet with persons who work in the Ottawa Police Service in order to verify the information we received during the research. We also wanted to find out what policies this institution has implemented to better respond to Francophone clients and French-speaking immigrant clientele.

According to one of the workers with whom we met, language is not an obstacle because when necessary the Ottawa Police calls on agencies that provide interpretation and translation services: Immigrant Women Services and Language of Life. Most of the police officers who speak French are stationed in the east end of the City of Ottawa where there is a large Francophone population. Women who live in the west or other sectors of the city are generally referred to police services in the east end.

If the language spoken by women who are victims of domestic violence is not a problem, what are the systemic barriers that a significant number of women who are victims of violence face, and why are women not comfortable with the Ottawa police?

We wish to reiterate that many participants in the action-research project mentioned such problems as shortage of Francophone staff, lack of sensitivity with women who are victims of violence, lack of understanding of the issue of violence in all its forms, discrimination, prejudice and racism against some ethno cultural groups, abuse of power and offensive comments. Women who are victims of violence are referred to police through different means, for example: the dispatcher on the 24/7 line, personal calls, community resource centers, city shelters, doctors, family members.



*“Racism exists in our institution. It is however, hidden; the police service is aware of the problem. The police service should provide an awareness program on cultural diversity for its personnel. We are working at this.”*

- Some police officers do not understand the issue of violence against women. They find it hard to understand the idea of having to respond many times to calls from the same woman.
- Often it is the women who are put out of the home by the spouse. When women are forced out onto the street, police say they find it difficult to obtain a space for them in a city shelter or in a women’s shelter.
- Some immigrant women do not want interpretation services from a member of their community of origin. This can often cause problems for women. They do not want to be identified by their own. They will also hesitate to lay charges against their violent spouse.
- Some police officers grew up in a violent family. They are affected by what women whom they assist are living, especially those officers who have never personally dealt with the issues in therapy.



*“We try as much as possible to work with women police officers, but it is not always possible because a majority of our staff is male. Some women are just not comfortable with male officers.”  
(original English quotation)*



*“It appears that police personnel are representative of the Canadian population. We have in our institution police officers who are prejudiced against certain cultures while on the other hand others have the same openness as many members of our multicultural society.”*

According to one of the workers with whom we met, in order to overcome these obstacles and deficiencies, measures were taken to improve the quality of the services provided to women who are victims of domestic violence. Emphasis is given to police training. Training is being developed on cultural diversity, nature and issues. Contacts have been made with different representatives from these communities. Training is also being developed on the issue of domestic violence. The Ottawa Police sits at the Round Table to End Violence Against Women. This group is made up of representatives from different agencies working with women who are victims of violence: City Council Chief, Immigrant Women Services, the Regional Coordinating Committee to End Violence against Women (RCCEVAW), the sub committee of the Sexual Assault Network, CALACS francophone of Ottawa, etc. This Round Table meets a number of times per year, examines women’s circumstances, and develops measures to be implemented in order to improve the lives of women.

### 3.9.3 Proposed Measures

---

- 102.** Train workers on Ontario Works policies so that all cases are treated according to policy.
- 103.** Train Ontario Works personnel on the issue of violence against women.
- 104.** Provide training to Ontario Works personnel on multiculturalism, the various issues and challenges facing immigrant women, refugee women and women without status.
- 105.** Denounce systemic racism and discrimination and implement measures to improve the situation.
- 106.** Increase the number of spaces in women’s shelters and in city shelters.
- 107.** Allocate funding for construction of new social housing units.
- 108.** Facilitate collaboration and dialogue between Ontario Works personnel and management concerning situations facing workers when they meet clients. These meetings would allow personnel to feel less isolated and

discouraged, and to be more equipped to resolve problems they deal with on a daily basis.

- 109.** Increase the number of hours allocated to legal aid in order to better evaluate files.
- 110.** Appoint more Francophone and bilingual judges in courts and administrative tribunals.
- 111.** Increase the number of feminist Francophone lawyers.
- 112.** Expand legal aid clinic mandates so that the services they offer will better correspond to the needs of women who are victims of violence.
- 113.** Allow women to use the available recourse when necessary (for example abuse by some lawyers). If there are repeated complaints against a particular lawyer, the Bar Association should step in to correct the situation.
- 114.** Respect and apply the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- 115.** Increase financing and improve resources for women who are victims of violence: more social assistance, better access to housing, better resources for children, and an end to arbitrary placements.
- 116.** Elected officials should remember the promises they made and respect them.
- 117.** Women's rights groups should work together to lobby for equal access to justice for women.
- 118.** The CAS should have more Francophone personnel and personnel representing the cultural diversity of its clientele.
- 119.** The CAS when placing children should as much as possible take into account the language, religion and culture of the child.
- 120.** Promote societal awareness of the issues of racism and discrimination based on cultural communities and French language.
- 121.** Increase the funding for some foster homes.
- 122.** Review some of the eligibility criteria for foster homes.
- 123.** Provide more tools and resources to women who are victims of violence so that their children can remain with them.

- 124.** Improve services for Francophone women in the city wherever they live.
- 125.** Increase training for police officers on the issue of violence against women.
- 126.** Promote awareness and training on cultural diversity and the needs of women for police officers; maintain dialogue with the different cultural communities in Ottawa.
- 127.** Expose the hidden face of racism in the police service.
- 128.** Participate in the Round Table to End Violence Against Women. Work in collaboration with its members.

## Chapter 4

---

# Summary

We recognize that over the years French language services in the region have increased and evolved. Agencies working with Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault have had to exert strong pressure on government in order that Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women receive the services to which they have the right. Even though the situation is better in Ottawa compared with the rest of Ontario, this action-research project clearly indicated that women still have numerous obstacles to overcome in order to receive appropriate services. Agencies and pressure groups should continue to lobby for the rights of Francophone women, in all their diversity. Many agencies lacking financial resources and personnel must perform miracles every day in order to maintain an adequate range of services. This lack of resources is one of the first obstacles clients face. We reiterate that only 10% of women who are victims of domestic violence and 6 % of women who are victims of sexual assault will seek assistance. Deficiencies must be remedied and means must be found to reach women who could benefit from existing services and to continue to develop French language services in the region.

In the course of this action-research project we met with service users, Francophone and Anglophone support workers, Anglophone and Francophone social workers, Francophone and Anglophone agency directors, Francophone and Anglophone lawyers, Francophone and Anglophone workers from related services, such as CAS, Ontario Works and the Ottawa Police.

Most of the support workers and directors we interviewed spoke of how in the last ten years, the cases they deal with have become much more difficult. Clients are diverse and they deal with multiple issues. Agencies are not only obliged to adapt to the new reality in Ottawa, but to find new tools for responding to clients' needs.

We reviewed all the obstacles and proposed measures given by the different groups that were consulted. Looking at all the material collected, we conclude that the obstacles and proposals are essentially the same in every group. It is very interesting to note that the information received at service users' focus group meetings corresponds to information gathered at the focus groups with Francophone support workers. There are common denominators among women who are victims of domestic violence, especially those who have lived with violence for a number of years: low self-esteem, fear of speaking about the violence, fear of being excluded and of not being heard. Women who are incest survivors or sexual assault survivors remain behind a wall of silence for many years before one day they are able to talk about what happened. Why such a long period of silence? The women we met in this group had witnessed violence in their childhood or had been victims themselves. This is why it is important now publicly to denounce violence against women and to promote available services at

all levels of institutions. Without openness in society surrounding the issue, women will continue to suffer in silence.

The phenomenon of violence against women and children is a societal evil that is not easy to understand. Why is it that a woman stays so long with a spouse who mistreats her? Why is it so difficult to leave? There are many reasons why. It is surely difficult to imagine what it is like to live a violent childhood when one had a happy childhood. It is difficult to understand what abuse is when one has never experienced it. Violence has many faces and is not always identifiable. Some women who have experienced depression for many years often were assaulted during their childhood. This point surfaced during focus groups with service users.

The observations of all the groups consulted fall into four main categories:

- The type of service, namely, women's shelters, city shelters, individual or group counselling, CAS services, Ottawa Police, legal services.
- Quality and quantity of services
- Visibility of services
- Service accessibility

When a woman is a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, the first step is to make sure she has a safe place to stay where her life is not in danger. Ideally, measures should be taken so that it is not always the women and children who must leave the family home and find themselves in poverty. Women who are victims of violence are at risk of becoming homeless. It is often difficult to imagine a woman who has just been assaulted finding herself on the street without even twenty-five cents to call a shelter, or not knowing that women's shelters do exist where she can go. It is important that services be visible and easy to access.

Crisis lines are very important. They are one of the first options chosen by a woman who is a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault when she begins looking for information to help her with the decisions she must take. Because of lack of funding, the Eastern Ontario Francophone crisis line is not yet well known by women. Measures must be taken to change this situation.

The shelter is often the last resort for a woman who is a victim of violence. We noted throughout the action-research project that those who seek space in a shelter face many obstacles and that this is a very difficult option to choose.

In 2002, one of the two Francophone women's shelters in Ottawa had to refuse 600 requests. A woman might call two or three times before obtaining space, so we conclude that at this shelter about 200 women did not obtain shelter. What happened to all these women and their children? Where did they go? To all

accounts, there is a serious shortage in Ottawa. Without available space, a large number of women stay with their violent spouse or go to a city shelter that does not meet their needs. This has serious consequences that are not always immediately evident. The women who are obliged to go to city shelters because of lack of space in women's shelters do not receive adequate services. These places do not meet the needs of Francophone women and immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence. A unanimous opinion was voiced by both agency directors and support workers who participated in this study, *"It is terrible to send women to these shelters."* Women who decide to go despite the difficult conditions make the decision because they have no other choice. Being in a city shelter, they can eventually obtain subsidized housing because of their priority status. Women however live in these shelters for longer and longer periods because of the lack of subsidized housing. There are immigrant women who have been in these shelters for over a year, which is unacceptable and intolerable.

Support workers and agency directors are very worried about the uncertainty and the lack of services for Francophone women and for French-speaking immigrant women. What message are we conveying to the population when women from disadvantaged sectors of the population or immigrant women who are in the process of rebuilding their life cannot even find housing in Ottawa, a city classified as one of the best in the world by the United Nations? This is a serious problem, which the government should resolve.

The recommendations of all the participants show that action is required at all levels. Implementation of the recommendations by the Comité Réseau, which has received the mandate to do so, will result in improving the visibility, accessibility and quality of services for women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

It is important for all agencies that work with women who are victims of sexist violence to continue to work together. There must be on-going awareness programs for related services whose clientele includes women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. What works for one agency can inspire others. Some agencies integrate their service users in their community. This has helped women regain a sense of meaning in their lives as well as a better self-image. This participation by ex-service users is a source of hope for new clients living especially difficult moments in their lives. In today's working environment and with available financial resources, agencies must be flexible and creative.

## Chapter 5

---

# Conclusion

In summary, French-language services are still difficult to access. They are not visible enough. They are not well known, especially by some institutions and agencies. Legal services for Francophones are insufficient. It is critical that women have fair access to justice in order to defend themselves. Measures must be taken to ensure that women's rights are respected.

To correct these deficiencies, the participants in the action-research project recommend that the following recommendations be implemented in order to improve services to Francophone women who are victims of violence.

Many support workers and others who work with women are unhappy with the complexities of a system that should be there to facilitate the lives of women who live with violence. Most of the women they help have a history of family violence. Intrusion into their life infringes on their freedom. *“They have been hurt all their life. Women are often ‘at their wits’ end”*.

In order to maintain existing French language services, but especially to see them evolve to respond to the specific and diverse needs of Francophone women and French-speaking immigrant women, the government should be committed to allocating greater funding for agencies, to building more social housing, to promoting access to justice, and to simplifying immigration procedures. Action is required throughout the present system. Some agencies are concerned about how to maintain the Francophone character of their agency and fear that in the long term this will become more difficult and that they will be obliged to become a bilingual agency.

We wish to reiterate that the *1986 French Language Services Act* recognizes the right to French language services in designated regions. Francophones should not be obliged to fight for their rights.

## Chapter 6

---

# Recommendations

Of the proposed measures suggested by all the participants, we have retained 28 recommendations that were endorsed by the participants at the ratification meeting held in Ottawa on January 15, 2004.

The recommendations are divided into six categories:

- Service Accessibility
- Service Visibility
- Quality and Quantity of Services
- Collaboration
- Specific Needs of Immigrant Women
- Follow-up

### Service Accessibility

1. Obtain a commitment from the Government of Ontario to improve accessibility of French language services in designated agencies by virtue of its obligations under the *1986 French Language Services Act*.
2. Obtain, within the framework of the government's commitment to improve accessibility of French language services, a plan to distribute funds to agencies according to demonstrated capacity to provide quality French language services and to fulfillment of designation criteria.
3. Support the efforts of Maison d'amitié in order that the new shelter might open its doors as quickly as possible.
4. Obtain additional social housing units to respond to the needs of Francophone women in order to reduce the length of time they spend in shelters, especially in shelters managed by the city of Ottawa.
5. Offer services comparable to those offered to Anglophone women to Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, regardless of the district of the city in which they reside.

6. Obtain improved access to family legal aid services for Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence.
7. Improve services to Francophone clients living in shelters managed by the city of Ottawa.
8. Require that the Children's Aid Society, when placing a child, take into account language as well as his or her cultural reality and religion.
9. Encourage all concerned groups to lobby that the city of Ottawa obtains status as a bilingual city as soon as possible so that all municipal services be fully accessible to Francophone persons.
10. Support marginalized women and facilitate their access to women's shelters, sexual assault centers, community resource centers and other services.

## **Service Visibility**

11. Establish a calendar of available services and distribute it to all Ottawa organizations working with women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
12. Develop and publish sufficient quantities of various brochures on services available for Francophone women from diverse cultural backgrounds, who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
13. Find different ways of reaching a variety of clientele who are members of the Francophone community. For example, in laundromats, door to door, etc.
14. Organize a campaign to promote awareness of the specific needs of Francophone women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault for those who work directly or indirectly with this clientele; for example in hospitals, medical clinics, the schools of the region, community centers.

## **Quality and Quantity of Services**

15. Promote recruitment of Francophone personnel from diverse cultural backgrounds to ensure French language service delivery at all levels in agencies, including police, hospitals, Ontario Works, Children's Aid Society.
16. Among institutional personnel including the Children's Aid Society, Ontario Works and the Ottawa Police, promote awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault and the reality of the Francophone women who are victims.

17. Promote recruitment and training of Francophone lawyers and judges in the justice system and in administrative tribunals that deal with women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
18. Increase working hours for legal aid lawyers who deal with women who are victims of violence.

## **Collaboration**

19. Encourage a spirit of cooperation and support between all agencies and institutions that offer services to women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
20. With a view to optimizing their collective action, facilitate the work of different agencies offering services to Francophone women who are victims of violence.
21. Mandate the Comité Réseau to sit on different city of Ottawa committees, for example, social housing, the fight against poverty, women's safety, in order to promote the needs of Francophone women with diverse cultural backgrounds who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
22. Assist Francophone women who are victims of violence to use any recourse available to them in the case of abuse by the system. The Comité Réseau could establish a process for registering complaints.

## **Specific Needs of Immigrant Women**

23. Denounce and fight against the systemic racism faced by immigrant women.
24. Adapt services to the needs of immigrant women.
25. Establish and implement internal policies to respond to the needs of immigrant French-speaking women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Recruit immigrant women as personnel in agencies.
26. Lobby for recognition of diplomas and studies from foreign countries in order to facilitate insertion into the job market and eventual financial autonomy.
27. Promote awareness among agency and institution personnel of the issue of violence in Ottawa's different cultural communities.

## Follow-up

28. Mandate the Comité Réseau to ensure project follow-up.

## Chapter 7

---

# Final Word

Unfortunately, violence against women is not an isolated occurrence and should not become something infrequently mentioned in the media except when it involves persons of a certain notoriety. Media examples in the last few months demonstrate even more clearly how it is difficult for women to break their silence, to be cross-examined and to receive the support they need. The government should continue to implement all the measures necessary to ensure an acceptable quality of life for women and children. Some of these measures are constructing new subsidized housing units, increasing social assistance payments, improving the services of all agencies that work with women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, facilitating access to the legal system and decreasing the time it takes to handle cases of refugees applying for status. Without these concrete and visible measures, many women will continue to live in situations that are dangerous for themselves and for their children.

In conclusion, we wish to quote The Right Honourable Paul Martin, Prime Minister of Canada, speaking to members of the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU) in Montreal on February 23 2004, *"If a society neither feeds nor houses its own, this is unacceptable."* We hope that The Right Honourable Paul Martin will remember these words when it comes to dealing with the necessity of constructing new social housing and of providing a better quality of life for all disadvantaged persons living in Canada.

# Chapter 8

---

## Appendices

### 8.1 Confidentiality Form

Accessibility of French Language Services Project

Comité Réseau

#### Consent Form and Confidentiality Form

The contents of the interviews and questionnaires will be used only for the purposes of writing the final research project report. No names will be mentioned in the report. However, we assume that we can use any information or example that was given to us in any interview or questionnaire. Please ensure that when you describe a specific experience of a woman, you omit any information that could identify the woman. Please also inform us if the information you are giving us is confidential.

All the research documents will be kept under lock and key for a two-year period in the offices of Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF). Mila Younes, the researcher, will transfer all the documents AocVF.

No interview with women who are victims of violence or sexual assault survivors will be tape-recorded.

We recommend to women who participate in the research to share only what they want to share in the group.

---

Signature:

Date:

Thank you for participating in this project

## 8.2 Questionnaire for Agency Directors

Interviews with Directors of Francophone and Anglophone Agencies that Work with Women Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

### Accessibility of French Language Services Project Questionnaire

Name of Your Agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Confidentiality of information: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Information on the Action-Research Project Undertaken by the Comité Réseau and Funded by Status of Women Canada

This research project focuses on identifying and evaluating deficiencies in service accessibility for Francophone women in the Ottawa region who are victims of violence. We will work in collaboration with organizations and with women to determine the needs of women and to identify systemic barriers they face. We wish to take action to deal with these barriers in order to improve service access for Francophone women in the Ottawa region who are victims of abuse. We will gather the decision makers with a view to implementing the changes proposed by the women.

1. Is your agency designated according to the *1986 French Language Services Act*?

---

---

Review of the five designation criteria:

- Permanence and quality of services
- Guaranteed availability of services
- Francophone representation on board of directors of the organization as well as on committees
- Francophone representation at various management levels.
- Accountability on the part of the board of directors and upper management levels for delivery of services in French

2. If your agency is not designated, do you have a specific policy concerning the services your agency offers?

---

---

3. Do you adhere to the agency's designation obligations or its policy?

---

---

4. Do you have a plan to develop French language services? If yes, what is it?

---

---

5. According to a survey of service users and support workers, an ideal French language service would include five major components:

- Competent Francophone personnel
- Adequate funding and human resources
- All services are guaranteed and accessible at all times.
- A feminist holistic approach to services that respects the diversity of women
- Organizational structure that supports service development.

Does your agency meet these criteria?

---

---

---

6. What plans do you have to better serve the needs of your Francophone clientele?

---

---

7. According to you, is the client demand for French language services increasing or decreasing, and why?
- 
- 
8. In your opinion is there a segment of the Francophone clientele that you are not reaching?
- 
- 
9. If yours is a bilingual agency is the number of Francophone workers who offer services proportionate to the number of Francophone clientele?
- 
- 
10. What is the ratio of Francophone clients to Anglophone clients?
- 
- 
11. Do Francophone women have access to the same services as Anglophone women?
- 
- 
12. Were you obliged to eliminate some services for Francophone women because of budget cuts? If yes, which ones?
- 
- 
13. Would you tend to offer English language services instead of French if the client speaks both languages?
- 
- 
14. Do you think it is important and essential that Francophone women who are victims of violence receive French language services?
- 
- 
15. How do you disseminate information about the services your agency offers?
- 
- 
16. Do you think that Francophone women still hesitate to request French language services because they do not want to be a bother by making requests that could be perceived as a favour not a right?
-

---

---

**17.** What is in place to facilitate access to services in French?

---

---

**18.** Are your clients satisfied with the services offered by your agency? Do you have an evaluation process?

---

---

**19.** In your opinion, what changes would result in more equitable services for Francophone clientele?

---

---

**20.** Do you plan to make these changes?

---

---

**21.** In your agency is there general agreement about the services provided for Francophone women?

---

---

**22.** What are your agency's priorities regarding services for Francophone women?

---

---

**23.** What tools or resources do you need to improve services for Francophone clientele?

---

---

**24.** Are you interested in participating in the ratification meeting to be held in October 2003?

---

Thank you for your participation.

## 8.3 Questionnaire for Francophone Support Workers

Groupe focus intervenantes francophones auprès des femmes victimes de violence conjugale et de violence à caractère sexuel

### Projet accessibilité des services en français Questionnaire

Nom de votre organisme: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Adresse: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tél. : \_\_\_\_\_

Courriel: \_\_\_\_\_

Personne contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Confidentialité des informations: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Information sur le projet recherche-action entreprise par le Comité Réseau et financé par Condition féminine Canada.

Cette recherche vise à identifier et évaluer les lacunes concernant l'accessibilité des services pour les femmes francophones victimes de violence dans la région d'Ottawa. Nous allons travailler en partenariat avec les organisations et les femmes pour déterminer les besoins des femmes et identifier les barrières systémiques auxquelles elles font face. Nous voulons agir sur ces barrières afin de favoriser l'accès aux services pour les femmes francophones victimes d'abus dans la région d'Ottawa.

Nous allons regrouper les décideur-es dans le but d'implanter les changements proposés par les femmes.

1. D'après vous, quelles sont les plus grandes difficultés auxquelles les femmes francophones victimes de violence font face pour avoir accès à des services?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Selon vous, est-ce que les services en français sont suffisamment identifiables?

---

---

2. En tant qu'intervenante de première ligne, quelles sont les lacunes que vous pouvez identifier à l'intérieur de votre agence, et auprès des autres agences avec lesquelles vous collaborez ?

---

---

3. Quelles mesures avez-vous mises en place pour rendre vos services plus accessibles aux femmes francophones ?

---

---

4. Vos services sont-ils accessibles aux femmes de groupes minoritaires francophones, par exemple les femmes avec un handicap, les femmes immigrantes, les femmes lesbiennes ?

---

---

---

5. Sinon quelles en sont les raisons?

---

---

6. Selon vous, est-ce que les femmes francophones prennent plus de temps pour aller chercher des services ? Pourquoi ?

---

---

---

7. Auriez-vous tendance à diriger une cliente vers des services en anglais plutôt qu'en français si elle s'exprime dans les deux langues ?

---

---

8. Vers quels services en particulier ?

---

---

9. Selon vous, la langue est-elle une barrière importante pour les femmes victimes de violence dans l'accès aux services ?

---

---

**10.** Selon vous, quels sont les changements à apporter afin d'améliorer l'accès des services pour les femmes francophones victimes de violence?

---

---

**11.** Pensez-vous que c'est important pour les femmes francophones victimes de violence de recevoir des services en français?

---

---

**12.** Êtes-vous intéressé-es à participer à la rencontre de validation qui aura lieu en octobre 2003?

---

---

Merci de votre participation.

## 8.4 Questionnaire for Anglophone Support Workers

Focus Group for Anglophone Support Workers Who Work With Women Who Have Experienced Violence

### Accessibility of Francophone Services Project Questionnaire

Name of your organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Confidentiality: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Information on the action-research project undertaken by the Comité Réseau and funded by Status of Women Canada.

This research project focuses on identifying and evaluating deficiencies in service accessibility for Francophone women who have experienced violence in the Ottawa region. We will work in collaboration with the organizations and with women to determine women's needs and identify the systemic barriers that they face. We wish to take action to deal with these barriers in order to improve service access for Francophone women in the Ottawa region who are victims of abuse. We will gather the decision makers with a view to implementing the changes proposed by the women.

1. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges facing Francophone women who are victims of violence when they seek services?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you believe that Francophone services are easily identifiable?

---

---

3. As a front line worker, what are the deficiencies that you can identify within your agency and in other agencies with whom you collaborate?

---

---

4. What measures have you implemented to make your services more accessible for Francophone women?

---

---

---

5. Are your services accessible to Francophone women who are part of a minority group, for example, women with a disability, women who are immigrants, lesbians?

---

---

6. If not, why not?

---

---

7. Do you believe that it takes longer for Francophone women to obtain services? Why?

---

---

8. If a woman speaks both languages, would you generally refer her to Anglophone services?

---

---

9. Toward which services would you refer her?

---

---

---

10. Do you consider language a significant barrier for Francophone victims of abuse who access services?

---

---

---

**11.** What changes must be made to improve accessibility for Francophone women who are victims of violence?

---

---

---

**12.** Do you consider it important for Francophone women to receive services in French?

---

---

**13.** Are you interested in participating in the ratification meeting to be held in October 2003?

---

---

Thank you for your participation

## 8.5 Questionnaire for Service Users

Focus Group for Service Users Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

### Accessibility of French Language Services Project

Name of Your Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Confidentiality of information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Information on the Action-Research Project Undertaken by the Comité Réseau and Funded by Status of Women Canada

This research project focuses on identifying and evaluating deficiencies in service accessibility for Francophone women in the Ottawa region who are victims of violence. We will work in collaboration with organizations and with women to determine the needs of women and to identify systemic barriers they face. We wish to take action to deal with these barriers in order to improve service access for Francophone women in the Ottawa region who are victims of abuse. We will gather the decision makers with a view to implementing the changes proposed by the women.

1. What have you done to try to obtain support services?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you lived with violence?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3.** If you said you have been living with violence for a number of years, has the lack of visibility of French language services been an obstacle in your process?

---

---

**4.** If you had known of a Francophone agency, would have it been easier for you to begin the process of seeking assistance?

---

---

**5.** Did you access English language services because they were easier to identify? Are there other reasons why you accessed English language services? Do you find they are more professional?

---

---

**6.** When you contacted the Anglophone agency, did you ask to be served in French?

---

---

**7.** Did they ask you if you wished to be served in French?

---

---

**8.** Did they refer you to Francophone resources in your area?

---

---

**9.** Is it advantageous for you to receive French language services? What changes are required in order to better serve the needs of Francophone clientele?

---

---

**10.** Overall, were you satisfied with the services you received? If yes, why and if no, why not.

---

---

**11.** What was the most difficult aspect of the process for you?

---

---

**12.** What would be your first recommendation to improve services for Francophone women who are victims of violence?

---

---

**13.** What services would you have liked to receive?

---

---

**14.** What would have helped you in your circumstances?

---

---

*Additional Questions for French-speaking immigrant women*

**15.** How long have you been in Canada?

---

---

**16.** What is your status: landed immigrant, refugee, other?

---

---

**17.** Were you a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault before coming to Canada?

---

---

**18.** Describe your present life circumstances: professional, housing,

---

---

**19.** What are the most difficult obstacles immigrant women face?

---

---

**20.** Are you interested in participating in the ratification meeting in October 2003?

Thank you for your participation.

## **8.6 List of Comité Réseau Member Organizations**

- Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF)
- CALACS francophone d'Ottawa
- Carlington Community and Health Services
- Catholic Family Service of Ottawa, Francophone program for women who are victims of sexual assault
- Catholic Family Service of Ottawa, Program for children who witness violence or who are victims of violence
- Catholic Family Service, Program for women who are victims of family violence
- Centre Espoir Sophie
- Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre
- Interval House of Ottawa
- Lowertown Community Resource Centre
- Maison d'amitié
- Nepean Community Resource Centre
- Ottawa Hospital, Regional Sexual Assault Treatment Program
- Ottawa Police Services, Victim Crisis Office
- Overbrook-Forbes Community Resource Centre
- University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic
- Vanier Community Service Centre
- Victim/Witness Assistance Program, (VWAP) Court House
- Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre
- Women's Initiatives for Safer Environment (WISE)

## Chapter 9

---

# Bibliography

CHANSONNEUVE, Deborah, July 2001, *Inclusion for Women with Disabilities, A Handbook for Violence Prevention/Intervention Services.*

GREAVES, L., L.O. HANKIVSKY and J. KINGSTON-RIECHERS, 1995, *Selected Estimates of the Costs of Violence Against Women*, London (Ontario), Research Centre on Violence against Women and Children.

MONKMAN, Victoria, 1996, *Le chemin du retour, survivre et vivre à la suite de l'abus sexuel.*

PENWILL, Kathryn, October 2002, *Vivre dans la zone grise: un document de réflexion en matière d'intervention féministe auprès des femmes et des enfants* (AOcVF) Ottawa.

SIROIS, Ghislaine, January 1999, *Does Oppression of Francophone Women Exist?*, Ottawa, AOcVF.

ROWE, Melissa and Tracy Jones CAMERON, August 2003-July 2004, *An Exploratory Study of the Gaps in Services for Immigrant and Refugee Women in the City of Ottawa.*

SMITH, Ekuwa, 2004, *Enhancing the Capacity of the Voluntary Sector and the Justice System to Respond to Violence against Immigrant Women and Visible Minority Women*, CCDS.

STATISTICS CANADA, Canadian Centre for Justice, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2001.*

STATISTICS CANADA, Canadian Centre for Justice, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2002.*

STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA, 2002, *Assessing Violence against Women: A Statistical Profile.*