



**Toronto West**  
**Local Immigration Partnership**  
**Community Collaboration at Work**

**Women Against Violence Action Group Presents:**

# **First Response Toolkit for Frontline Staff**

**Second Edition - February 15, 2018**



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

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# Mission Statement

Women Against Violence is an Action Group of the Toronto West Local Immigration Partnership (TWLIP) that aims to promote the message that gender-based violence is everyone's issue to address. The Action Group supports local community organizations in enhancing knowledge and building capacity to address this issue.

## Purpose of Toolkit

This toolkit has been prepared to help frontline staff:

- Respond to clients and situations with sensitivity
- Increase women's safety
- Provide information on resources and options
- Make effective, timely referrals to specialized services and supports
- Encourage women to take action to end the violence and begin to take steps towards positive changes in their lives.

**Note:**

*This guide is not intended to replace an agency's own policy, service plan or referral procedure.*



*Picture Source: Amnesty International*

# Defining Violence Against Women

## What is Gender-Based Violence?

**Gender-based violence (GBV) includes any form of violence that is based upon an individual's gender, gender expression or gender identity and is intended to control, humiliate or harm the individual. GBV includes various forms of violence such as domestic violence, physical violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, forced labour, human trafficking, femicide, cyber-violence and emotional and psychological violence (Ministry of Community and Social Services).**

## Facts

**Indigenous women** experience violence at a rate that is **2.7X** higher than that which is reported by non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2017) and report more severe forms of violence, (Statistics Canada, 2013).

**Transgendered people** are almost **2X** as likely as cisgendered women to experience intimate partner violence (Nadine, MacGregor & MacQuarrie, 2015).

Women with physical, mental or health related limitations experienced nearly double the rates of spousal violence and are over **2.5X** more likely to be a victim of robbery compared to women without any activity limitations (General Social Survey, 2009).

**Immigrant and refugee** women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence due to language barriers, isolation from their family, precarious work and uncertain legal status (Status of Women Canada, 2015).

Cost of violence against women is total of **1 billion** dollars each year, Criminal Justice (\$684 million), Police (\$187 million), Counselling (\$294 million). (War at home 2016)

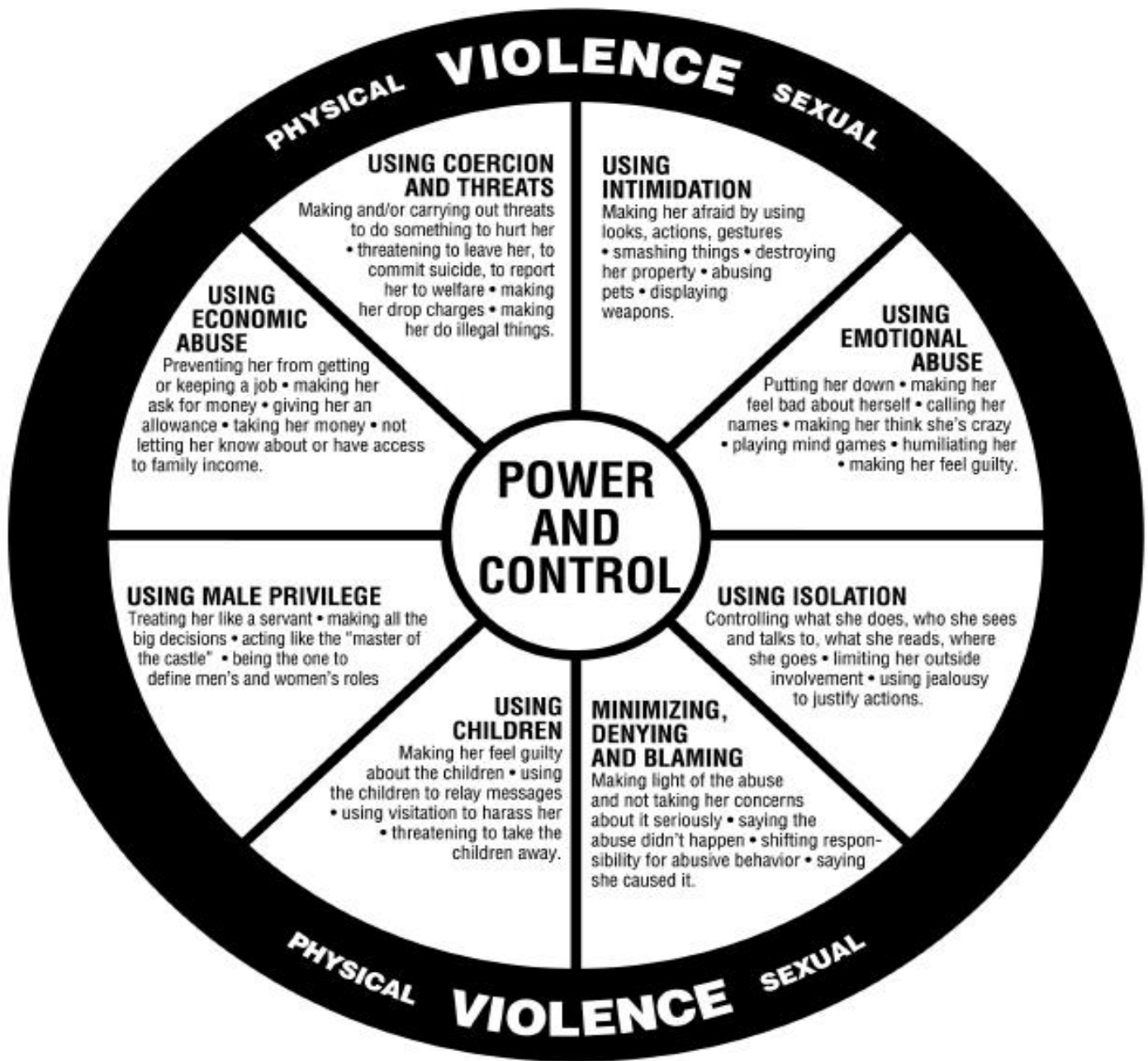
Women have **an intimate partner homicide** rate **4X** higher than males (Statistics Canada, 2014)

**Women are six times** more likely than men to say the incident was not reported out of fear of their spouse (19% versus 3%) and they are almost twice as likely to say they did not want anyone to find out (44% versus 26%) (2009)

Almost 6 in 10 women with **children** who were assaulted by spouses said their children heard or saw the violent episode (59%) (Status of women, 2009)

# The Dynamics of Abuse

Violence within adult relationships involves intentional and systematic tactics of abuse which are used to establish power and maintain control over the thoughts, beliefs, and conduct of a partner. These tactics can include, but are not limited to, the examples below:



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT

202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218-722-2781  
www.duluth-model.org

For Additional Wheels of Relationship Dynamics,  
<http://www.theduluthmodel.org/training/wheels.html>

# First Response Steps

Please note that this is a framework with strategies to support a client through a disclosure of abuse. However, each response must be adapted to support a client's individual concerns, needs and goals.

## A. Identifying Abuse

As a worker, you may suspect a woman is experiencing abuse. She may not want you to call her at home or leave messages. She may cancel meetings at the last minute or appear socially isolated, sad, afraid or withdrawn. This client may initially present to your agency asking questions about various possible outcomes and she may speak in hypotheticals. Or she may say that she is gathering information on behalf of an individual she knows who is experiencing abuse.

If you suspect that a woman you are working with may be experiencing violence or abuse, it is imperative to respond supportively and remember that she is the expert of her own experiences. She may not identify her experiences as abuse, and she may not choose to discuss the topic further.

If she should choose to identify the abuse, it is extremely important to provide her with opportunities for her to tell her own story through her own words.

Here are some initial open-ended questions you could ask, to encourage her to discuss it with you:

- **(Woman's name)**, you have told me a little bit about **(abusive person/ type of relationship/abuse tactic)**. Can you tell me a little about what happened the last time this occurred?
- How often does this behaviour happen? How do you feel when **(abusive person)** behaves like this?
- What type of behaviours would scare you if **(abusive person)** acted against you?
- Has **(abusive person)** ever threatened you or hurt you? Physically, emotionally, financially?
- Do you have concerns about your safety? Your children's safety?
- Are you concerned about the impact of your partner's behavior on your children?
- Do you feel safe to go home after our meeting today?

## B. Responding to a Disclosure

If a woman does disclose abuse, the front-line worker should keep in mind that their response must be sensitive to the client. The frontline worker should:

- Remain calm and remind the client that the abuse she is facing is not her fault.
- Listen with no judgement, validating and believing what she is saying.
- Respect how much or how little context of the abuse the client is willing to share (VAW-informed interpreters should be used whenever necessary).

- Assess and mitigate the level of risk she faces, while supporting whatever decision she chooses to keep herself safe.
- Get the woman's permission before taking action on her behalf, and respect her right to make her own choices.
- Be transparent as you explain confidentiality, along with the limitations of confidentiality when issues of child welfare arise.

## **C. Basic Safety Planning**

A **safety plan** is created in collaboration with the client that includes actions and strategies she has found effective in keeping herself safe. The plan can include new resources that she is willing to employ to increase her safety.

A safety plan can include potential action plans, a list of resources or referrals specific to her needs, or a safe escape plan, should she ever consider leaving the abusive situation. If she discloses that she is in immediate danger (i.e. of being assaulted onsite/ during the current meeting) and you as a worker are at risk as well, prioritize safety and call emergency services (911). If she has stated that she is in danger and is seeking supports, determine:

- If she has any immediate medical injuries that need to be addressed. If she consents, support her to seek out medical assistance for physical ailments. If possible, accompany her to this emergency visit.
- If she would like to call 911 to report the abusive incident and, if so, support her with that call. Advocate for any necessary language interpretation services she may need.
- If she is in need of additional counselling services or needs to connect to specialized VAW services, provide her with crisis numbers for her to call. Note: a list of available crisis resources is located on page 13 of this kit.
- If she does not feel safe to return home, brainstorm safe places that she can stay. This could include a relative, trusted friend, neighbor, VAW women's shelters, or safe community spaces such as a church.
- If she is in need of a shelter space, locate crisis shelters through [www.sheltersafe.ca](http://www.sheltersafe.ca) and support her in calling appropriate shelter locations to complete an intake.
- Create a list of crisis supports, community resources, personal support and emergency contacts she can keep to access services. If possible, keep a copy in her client file.
- If she chooses not to access alternative housing and wishes to remain in the relationship, provide her with referrals to specialized VAW resources to create a more in-depth safety plan.
- Encourage her to keep a copy of all important documents with her or in another location for safe keeping. If possible, keep these photocopies in her client file with your agency.

### **Also ask:**

- ✓ *About her children if she has any?*
- ✓ *Ask what makes her feel safe and what makes her feel unsafe?*

*Source: Adapted from Bathurst Finch Women's Safe from Violence Initiative Community Worker First Response Protocol, May, 2014.*

# Practice LIVES

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## Listen

Listen closely with empathy not judgement

## Inquire about needs and concerns

Assess and respond to their needs and concerns – emotional, physical, social and practical

## Validate

Show that you believe and understand the client

## Enhance safety

Discuss how to protect them from further harm.

## Support

Help them connect to services, social support

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## Signs of Immediate Risk:

- Worsening Violence
- Threatened her with a weapon
- Tried to strangle her
- Beaten her when pregnant
- Constantly jealous
- “Do you believe he could kill you?”

Source: *Health care for women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence* (2014) pg.100.  
[www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html)



# Asking about Violence

*You might say:* “Many women experience problems with their husband or partner, but this is not acceptable.”

*You might ask:*

- Are you afraid of your partner?
- Has he or someone else at home threatened to hurt you? If so, when?
- Has he threatened to kill you?
- Does he bully you or insult you?
- Does he try to control you – for example not letting you have money or leave the house?



## Behaviours Typically Displayed By Abusive Men during the Cycle of Abuse

### Honeymoon

- Apologetic
- Respectful
- More attentive
- Improved communication
- Helps around the house
- Promises to change
- Gives gifts and compliments

### Tension

- Insults
- Threats
- Sarcasm
- Jealousy
- Accusation
- Fault finding
- Controls what she does
- Sudden mood changes
- Emotionally distant

### Explosion

- Intimidating body language
- Will not allow her to leave
- Throws things
- Slams doors
- Silent treatment
- Physical assault
- Name calling
- Yelling & swearing

## Tips for managing the conversation

- Choose a private place to talk, where no one can overhear (but not a place that indicates to others why you are there).
- Assure her that you will not repeat what she says to anyone who doesn't need to know. If you are required to report her situation, explain what you must report and to whom.
- First, encourage her to talk and show that you are listening.
- Encourage her to continue talking if she wishes, but do not force her to talk. (“Do you want to say more about that?”)
- Allow silences. If she cries, give her time to recover.

***Remember: Always respect her wishes.***

*Source: Health care for women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence (2014) pg 16&.89  
[www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html)*



**Follow up/ Resources (Check the referrals provided, with worker names):**

| <b>Service Referred</b>                           | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Staff Name</b> |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Medical Services</b>     | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Children's Services</b>  | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Police Services</b>      | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Legal Services</b>       | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Housing Services</b>     | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Financial Services</b>   | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Interpreter Services</b> | _____               | _____             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Support Group</b>        | _____               | _____             |

**Other Relevant Information:**

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

Staff Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

***Please note: Keep the original document in your file and send copy to your Manger and Executive Director without client's name to ensure confidentiality***

*This samples is taken from COSTI's "Wife Assault/Woman Abuse" Protocol Prepared by Marina Morrow June 1993*

# Referral Chart

| What to refer for  | Where/ who to refer to | Contact Information | Responsibility for follow- up |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Shelter/Housing    |                        |                     |                               |
| Crisis Centre      |                        |                     |                               |
| Financial Aid      |                        |                     |                               |
| Legal Aid          |                        |                     |                               |
| Support Groups     |                        |                     |                               |
| Counselling        |                        |                     |                               |
| Mental Health Care |                        |                     |                               |
| Primary Care       |                        |                     |                               |
| Child Care         |                        |                     |                               |

Source: *Health care for women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence (2014) pg.32*  
[www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/vaw-clinical-handbook/en/index.html)

# Crisis Lines & Resources

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>VAW Crisis Lines</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assaulted Women’s Helpline: 416.863.0511, Toll-Free 1.866.863.0511</li> <li>• Distress Centre: 416.486.1456</li> <li>• Ernestine’s Women’s Shelter Crisis Line: 416.746.3701 ext.0</li> <li>• Toronto Rape Crisis Centre: 416.597.8808</li> <li>• VAW Shelter Crisis Line: <a href="http://www.sheltersafe.ca">www.sheltersafe.ca</a> (each shelter has a crisis line)</li> <li>• Women’s College Hospital Domestic Violence Program: 416.966.7111</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Shelters</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central Family Intake: 416.397.5637 or 416.338.4766</li> <li>• VAW Shelters in Canada: <a href="http://www.sheltersafe.ca">www.sheltersafe.ca</a></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Legal Advice</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barbra Schlifer Clinic: 416.323.9149</li> <li>• CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario): <a href="http://www.cleo.on.ca">www.cleo.on.ca</a></li> <li>• Criminal Injuries Compensation Board: <a href="http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/cicb">www.sjto.gov.on.ca/cicb</a></li> <li>• Law Society Referral Services (LSRS): 416.947.5255, Toll Free: 1.855.947.5255, <a href="http://www.findlegalhelp.ca">www.findlegalhelp.ca</a></li> <li>• Local Community Legal Clinic, Duty Counsel Offices, Specialty Legal Clinics: <a href="http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact">www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact</a></li> <li>• METRAC: 416.392.3135 (Information Regarding Legal Rights)</li> <li>• Ontario Legal Aid:</li> <li>• Rexdale Legal Clinic: 416.741.5201</li> <li>• South Etobicoke Community Legal Services: 416.252.7218</li> <li>Toll Free: 1.800.668.8258 (interpretive services available), <a href="http://www.legalaid.on.ca">www.legalaid.on.ca</a></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Police<br/>Victim Services</b>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 911</li> <li>• Service Crisis line: 416.808.7066</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Employment &amp;<br/>Social Services<br/>(Ontario Works)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.toronto.ca">www.toronto.ca</a> (Search employment services to verify closest location to the client.)</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Toronto<br/>Community<br/>Services</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.211toronto.ca">www.211toronto.ca</a> 416.397.4636</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Other Resources</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Joining Hands: Reaching Out To Our Communities – A Training Manual For Community Leaders on Violence Against Women:</b> <a href="http://www.rexdalewomen.org/pdf/RWC_2011_NFF_lowres.pdf">http://www.rexdalewomen.org/pdf/RWC_2011_NFF_lowres.pdf</a></li> <li>• <b>Ontario Woman Abuse Screening Project Learning Resources:</b> <a href="http://womanabusescreening.ca/en/lr?Name=Value">http://womanabusescreening.ca/en/lr?Name=Value</a></li> <li>• <b>Ontario Women’s Directorate :Training for staff:</b> <a href="http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/organizations/training.shtml">http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/organizations/training.shtml</a></li> <li>• <b>Ontario Women’s Justice Network: Understanding Violence Against Women:</b> <a href="http://owjn.org/owjn_2009/legal-information/understanding-violence-against-women">http://owjn.org/owjn_2009/legal-information/understanding-violence-against-women</a></li> <li>• <b>Opening Doors for Abused Women – A Collaborative Approach to Prevent Violence Against Women:</b><a href="http://www.rexdalewomen.org/pdf/NFF-Campaign-Opening-Doors-for-Abused-Women2014-15.pdf">http://www.rexdalewomen.org/pdf/NFF-Campaign-Opening-Doors-for-Abused-Women2014-15.pdf</a></li> <li>• <b>The Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women: Learning to end abuse:</b> <a href="http://onlinetraining.learningtoendabuse.ca/resources">http://onlinetraining.learningtoendabuse.ca/resources</a></li> <li>• <b>What is Gender-Based Violence Training:</b> <a href="http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what_is_GBV.PDF">http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what_is_GBV.PDF</a></li> </ul> |

# Glossary of VAW Terms

**Abuser/Abusive Partner** is a person who engages in a pattern of coercive, exploitative and violent tactics against an intimate partner in order to establish and maintain power, control and dominance over the partner.

**Advocacy** includes the support that domestic violence programs offer to individual women, including 24-hour crisis line, shelter, food, clothing, transportation, general, legal and medical assistance, accompaniment to court and other services, information and referrals, assistance with rent and utilities, crisis intervention, support groups, men's re-education groups and childcare and children's programming.

**Battered Woman/Domestic Violence Victim/Survivor** is someone who has experienced verbal abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse or sexual violence.

**Child Support** means money that one parent pays to the other parent to help support their children financially after a separation or divorce. It is also sometimes called "maintenance."

**Child support guidelines** are laws with rules and tables used to determine how much child support should be paid when parents separate or divorce. The Federal Child Support Guidelines are regulations under the Divorce Act and apply when parents divorce. Provincial or territorial guidelines apply when there is no divorce.

**Economic Abuse** includes, but is not limited to the withholding and/or restricting of money needed for food and/or clothing; denying the right to seek and/or maintain employment; taking personal money; denying independent access to money; and/or, excluding the victim from financial decision-making.

**Gender- Based Violence (GBV)** is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society.

**Physical Abuse** includes bodily harm, discomfort or injury including hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, pushing, burning, biting, torture, restraining, and assault with a weapon, withholding of food and/or medical care, and/or murder.

**Psychological/Emotional Abuse** is any act that provokes fear, diminishes the woman's dignity or sense of self-worth, and/or intentionally inflicts psychological trauma as a means of exerting power and control over the woman. Psychological abuse can include criticism, degradation, humiliation, excessive possessiveness, threats (suicidal, homicidal, deportation, kidnapping children, harming family, friends and/or pets), controlling a person's daily activities, social isolation, and/or purposeful destruction of property and/or pets.

**Sexual Abuse** includes any act of forced sexual activity, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual touching, the refusal to use protection from STD's or unwanted pregnancy during sex, and forced exposure to, or participation in pornography or prostitution.

**Spiritual Abuse** includes degrading another person's spiritual beliefs, withholding the means to practice, and/or forcing adherence to a belief system.

**Verbal Abuse** is the use of vexatious comments that are known or that ought to be known to be unwelcome, threatening, degrading, offensive, and/or embarrassing. Economic/Financial Abuse is the misuse of an individual's money or belongings by another individual.

**Violence against Women (VAW) / Woman Abuse** is directed to those that identify as women, through the actual or threatened physical, psychological, sexual, financial, verbal, or spiritual abuse by someone with whom she shares an acquaintance, intimate, familial, or romantic relationship. The United Nations General Assembly (1993) also defines woman abuse as, "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring or in private."

**Women Abuse** is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." Using this definition as a point of departure, woman abuse is defined here as the actual or threatened physical, psychological, sexual, financial, verbal, or spiritual abuse of a woman by someone with whom she has/or has had an intimate, familial or romantic relationship (United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993).

*Source: World Health Organization 2013*

# Acknowledgments

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Access Alliance

AIDS Committee of Toronto

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Ernestine's Women Shelter

Elsbeth Heyworth Centre for Women

Islamic Social Service and Resources Association

JobStart

Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services

Rexdale Women's Centre

Toronto Public Health

YMCA

*Note: This toolkit will be available on the Toronto West LIP website at [www.torontowestlip.ca](http://www.torontowestlip.ca)*

# Notes