

BC PROVINCIAL CUTS

INFORMATION ACCURATE AS OF APRIL 10, 2002

CUTS TO PROVINCIAL FUNDING of a wide range of services will potentially impact children by **increasing poverty** and **increasing their exposure to violence**. Long ranging anticipated impacts on children include health, social and justice system costs associated with living in poverty and violence. **One in every four women in BC** have been abused by their intimate partners (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1993) and research has found that **children are abused in up to 70% of families** in which woman abuse occurs (Edelson, 1999a; Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1991). When women are abused, children are affected whether or not the children are being physically or sexually abused (Bennett, 1991; Ericksen & Henderson, 1992; Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Bennett, & Jankowski, 1997; Hughes, 1988; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986; Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987; Kolbo, 1996; Peled, Jaffe, & Edleson, 1995). Children who witness violence are traumatized by the violence, and the line between witnessing violence and child abuse is unclear. In fact, studies of children are often limited by the difficulty in distinguishing between the impact of witnessing abuse and experiencing direct abuse (Edelson, 1999b). Some researchers (e.g., Jaffe, 1990) have found that some children appear to cope well in spite of exposure to violence, with the difference being attributable to whether the child stays with the non-abusing parent. However, the majority of children from homes where there is violence are more likely to have a variety of problems, including troubles in school, difficulty in problem solving, being aggressive, using drugs and/or alcohol, and using violence (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990; Schuler, & Nair, 2001; Suh & Abel, 1990).

With the cuts to provincial funding, it is anticipated that women will be less able to leave abuse, will be more vulnerable financially to abuse, and will be less able to protect their children. Cuts to legal aid and aspects of the justice system are particularly problematic.



Research has shown that abusive partners often use children as tools of abuse during and after the relationship, and then use custody and access legal proceedings as tools of abuse [Taylor, 1996; Varcoe, 2002]. Due to cuts in legal aid, women will not be able to obtain conditions such as custody of their children and supervised access programs that assist them in protecting their children. The cuts to legal aid services in rural communities will reduce women's ability to access basic legal information regarding their rights. Any decrease in language programs will make this problem worse for women with limited skill in English and their children.

Children who themselves are abused will have less access to fewer financial, educational, counselling, and childcare resources as programs in schools are cut, women's centres are cut, welfare rates are cut, and human resource and childcare referral offices closed. Cuts to childcare programs, subsidies and resources centres will increase the likelihood of them being left in the care of untrained personnel, or worse, abusive parents. They will also be less able to leave abusive parents and become independent. The new requirement that youth must be independent for two years before being eligible for social assistance, combined with the cuts to minimum wage will force many youth to remain in abusive situations or take to the street. Given the well-known relationship between abuse and youth homelessness (e.g. Rew, 2001; Craig, 1998) it is reasonable to anticipate that youth will endure homelessness, prostitution and other risky situations in order to escape violence in their homes. Those children already in foster care will be forced at age 17 to leave care and enter similarly unstable circumstances.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT ON CHILDREN

INFORMATION

BC Institute Against Family Violence
(604) 669-7055
1-877-755-7055 (toll free)

BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs
(604) 633-2506

BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses
(604) 669-6943

RESOURCES

Government of British Columbia, Minister of Finance
www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca

PovNet
www.povnet.org

BC Coalition of Women's Centres
www3.telus.net/bcwomen/bcwomen

Access Justice
www.accessjustice.ca

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
www.policyalternatives.ca/bc

BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
www.bccpd.bc.ca

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Cuts to income assistance will be equally dangerous. Cuts to eligibility for single parents will increase economic dependence, forcing women to enter or remain in relationships with abusive partners or to be exposed to situations in which they will be more vulnerable to sexual and/or physical assault. Reliance on prostitution for survival will be increased. All of these increases in violence to women will mean increased exposure of children to violence. Further, more poverty for women means more poverty for their children.

While cuts to education are not directly related to issues of violence against women, they impact women who have been

abused and their children in important ways. Children who witness or experience abuse often have learning or behavioural problems that require individualized attention and counselling. Decreased access to counsellors and teaching assistants and larger class sizes will impact such children. Cancellation of provincial funding for the Anti-Bullying Program further decreases school resources to deal with violence, sexism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism. All of these cuts will be made more problematic for children with limited skill in English by cuts to language and intercultural programs.

CUTS, POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

40% cuts to legal aid services: 60 offices closed; 150 lawyers and paralegals laid off; 8,000 applicants for family law legal aid will be refused.

Increased emphasis on mediation in child custody and access by requiring "disputes to go to mediation...mandatory referral to Family Justice Counselors for families undergoing separation and divorce...[and] making recommendations on contested child access and custody cases" (Ministry of the Attorney General Service Plan).

The Child, Youth and Family Advocate Program cut (Ministry of the Attorney General Service Plan).

18.4% cut in social assistance rate for single parents with one child. Single parent must work when child is age 3. If on social assistance a woman is no longer able to work and keep any earnings or a portion of family maintenance.

36 human resource offices closed.

Young people are now required to be independent for two years before being eligible for social assistance. Many young people are already homeless as a result of fleeing violence.

Child care programs have been cut: 40 resource centres closed, subsidies and eligibility thresholds have been reduced.

Core funding for Women's Centres eliminated by 2004.

IMPACT: KNOWN AND POTENTIAL

Women will have less access to legal representation to deal with child custody and access and financial matters. Women fleeing abuse usually cannot afford legal representation. Custody by the non-violent partner is in the children's best interests, yet custody is most often contested where violence is a factor.

Women and children will be at further risk of violence because the need for ongoing contact prolongs conflict. Mediation in situations of partner abuse is unsafe and the potential for intimidation makes fair settlement unlikely (Scutt, 1988 ; Bruch, 1988; Greatbatch, 1999). Though the Ministry Service Plan acknowledges this, women will have to identify as abused and resist mediation.

Children will no longer have legal representation in custody cases.

Single parents, mostly mothers, will be forced further into poverty, increasing the already dismal rates of child poverty in BC (one in 5 children).

Young people will be less able to flee violence (both to themselves and/or to others) in their homes.

Increased child/youth prostitution, homelessness and poverty.

Safe childcare will be less available, increasing the dependence of women on abusive partners, and exposing children to more violence.

In addition to children's mothers having less access to support, and thus being less able to leave abusive partners, and being poorer, direct services to children offered by some Women's Centres may be lost.