

## B.C. not doing enough to curb domestic violence: report

Tamsyn Burgmann, The Canadian Press

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**When a restaurant owner named Peter Lee murdered his wife, young son and parents before killing himself near Victoria in 2007, British Columbia's solicitor general promised to fight domestic violence.**

### PHOTOS



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The BC Coroners Service held an inquest, the province spent \$250,000 on risk-assessment training, and the government convened a panel to examine 29 deaths and make recommendations.

But the attention was short-lived. Instead, B.C. has become a province that's falling behind in targeting domestic violence and typically only takes action after high-profile cases, a new report concludes.

The report was released Monday by researchers at Simon Fraser University, who reviewed the incidence of domestic violence in the province. It calls on the B.C. government to develop a comprehensive plan to protect women and children.

"While there's been a lot of things done recently in response to some very high-profile deaths, all of us are calling for a longer-term strategy that's not just reactive," said Tracy Porteous, executive director with the Ending Violence Association of B.C.

Porteous has spent 30 years working in the anti-violence sector and assisted in compiling the report, which was led by Simon Fraser University's FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.

Family violence ranges from abuse or assault between intimate partners to child and elder abuse.

The rate of family-related homicides in B.C. is slightly above the Canadian average, and below only the Prairie provinces and territories, according to the report.

Some 73 people murdered between January 2003 and August 2008 were killed in domestic disputes, with 75 per cent of the victims being women. There were 605 homicides overall during the same period.

The report suggests the province should design an all-encompassing framework to combat such violence, emphasizing prevention and bridging gaps in the services and systems already available.

That includes not only encouraging victims to come forward to police if they've been abused, but also ensuring those victims know how to access services to help them cope or escape.

"You can't roll out a message to tell people that if (violence) is happening, come forward, and then have no services if people come forward," said Porteous.

She noted B.C. could look to the example of Ontario, which has a broad provincial strategy in place to deal with domestic and sexual violence.

Such a plan should also include new legislation, improve training for first responders and social workers, and put forward resources to target abusive men, according to the report.

Education should be launched in schools to get a consistent message across about respecting women and girls, consent in sexual intimacy and illustrate warning signs of abuse.

"Similar to drinking and driving, we want it to become socially unacceptable for men to treat women in abusive ways," Porteous said. "The only way that's going to happen is for other men to start speaking up."

Porteous noted a surcharge for victims of crime fund has ballooned to \$60 million in B.C., but the money hasn't been earmarked for any projects over recent years and simply continues to grow.

About six per cent of Canadians over age 15 reported physical or sexual violence at the hands of a current or former partner, according to Statistics Canada. Those rates have been stable over the past five years, with women continuing to be most likely to be victimized multiple times by more serious forms of violence.

The report also found younger people are more likely to be affected by domestic violence. Other groups at higher risk include people in common-law relationships as opposed to marriage, people with physical or mental health conditions and aboriginals.

It noted the rate of reporting victimization to police has been decreasing over the past five years. Women in particular are choosing not to contact authorities, deeming it a private matter or too minor to take that step.

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