

**MOVING FORWARD
TOGETHER:
A REVIEW**

inform'Elles

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

2017–2021

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Femmes et Égalité
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Women and Gender
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Canada 

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women continues to be a significant social and economic problem in Canada. It has serious repercussions on our health, justice and social service systems. For Francophone women from OLMCs (official language minority communities), the difficulty—and often the impossibility—of obtaining services in their own language has a negative, even dissuasive, impact when the time comes for them to seek support. Whether they are migrants (from another province), immigrants or refugees, women whose official language of communication is French do not generally have access to guidance that is adapted to their cultural reality.

British Columbia's Francophone community, despite its growth, benefits from very few direct services in French, even in health care. The precariousness of funding and the lack of regular funding from the province to provide direct service to Francophones has greatly hindered the provision of support to those in need, contributing to the social and economic problems experienced by many of these people. The provincial helpline "Inform'Elles", created in 1998, is an example of such a service. Its purpose was to support women experiencing violence, in French, by redirecting them to the appropriate services, mainly available in English. Unfortunately, in 2012, Inform'Elles was forced to close its helpline, leaving Francophone women experiencing violence without any direct point of contact.

Find the full report (in French) at www.informelles.ca

TIMELINE

Submission of the research report “Que ça change!!” (in French only).
Main finding: **there are no services in French for Francophone women victims of violence.**

Anti-violence training in Vancouver for Francophone women from across the province. About thirty women take this two-day training session.

“On en parle/Let’s Talk About It”, an awareness-raising project touring the province.

2000 : Operating 30 hours a week, Inform’Elles receives between **60 and 80 calls per month** from across the province and **15 to 20 in-person visits** in the Vancouver office.

2002 : **Phase 1 of the project “Ensemble en sécurité”** (in French only) in Vancouver.

1994

1995

1998

2000-2003

2004

The service Inform’Elles is set up by Réseau-Femmes C.-B. with a **part-time staff and an anti-violence committee** supporting her work.

Inform’Elles closes from January to October due to lack of funding. The service resumes its activities in October, operating 25 hours a week, and receives close to 60 requests per month.

Phase 2 of the project “Ensemble en sécurité” (in French only) in Prince George.

Project “Rebâtir sa vie” (in French only) for women survivors of violence, and **phase 3 of Ensemble en sécurité** (in French only). In December, Inform’Elles is incorporated.

Funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada for the **project Moving Forward Together** which aims to improve services for Francophone women who experience violence in British Columbia and the Yukon.

2005

2006

2011

2017-2021

2020-2021

Inform’Elles undertakes an institutional diagnostic assessment that leads to the **closing of its helpline** in 2012 and **to the beginning of a reinvention process.**

Inform’Elles continues its work on partnerships and **implements pilot initiatives to serve women and raise awareness in communities.**

BY THE NUMBERS

Violence against women has serious repercussions on our health, justice and social service systems. However, the statistics are fragmentary, knowledge is lacking, and the very capacity to identify Francophone women who experience violence is limited.

VIOLENCE BETWEEN INTIMATE PARTNERS



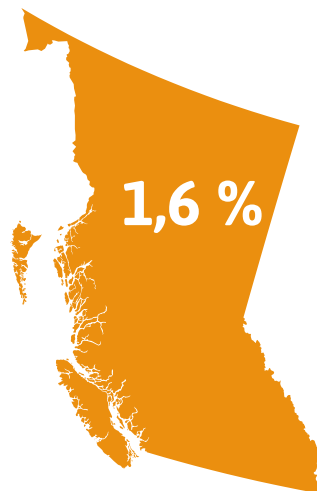
In 2018, according to police-reported data, **eight out of ten victims of violence between intimate partners were women.** According to Statistics Canada, the number of women who were victims of domestic violence incidents reported to the police in BC was 9,161 (Statistics Canada 2018).

The Francophone Community in British Columbia

FRENCH AS MOTHER TONGUE

71 705

If we consider the Francophone community in British Columbia, the number of people who declared French as their mother tongue either exclusively, or in combination with other languages, was 71,705, which represented 1.6% of the population of the province.



INCREASE BETWEEN 2001 AND 2016

+ 12,7 %

The number of people who declared French as their mother tongue either exclusively, or in combination with other languages has increased by 12.7% between 2001 and 2016 (Statistics Canada 2016).

- Statistics Canada. 2016. *The French Language in British Columbia, 2001 to 2016: Facts and Figures*
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019017-eng.htm>

- Statistics Canada. 2018. «Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2018.» <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00018-eng.pdf?st=WOjAvfpl>.

DOUBLE INVISIBILITY

Currently, British Columbia supports more than 400 programs, services and initiatives for women and their children experiencing violence. Of these 400 programs, none offers services in French, aside from access to interpreters or to written material. Informational and educational brochures from local and provincial organizations, translated into French, continue to be often difficult to find in community spaces.



“Many interpreters work for a minimum of four hours. Often, we need an interpreter only for a short meeting or for a phone call. It is not within our reach, it’s too expensive.”



– Director, Rise Women’s Legal Centre

Most of BC’s organizations mainly translate their documents into languages like Punjabi, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Farsi or Spanish. French is often seen as superfluous because “most Francophones understand English fairly well”. However, it is often forgotten that, due to the history of colonization, French is also a secondary language for many women from some African countries. This important fact, often overlooked, prevents the provision of adequate support services to many women who speak French, among other languages.

For French-speaking women experiencing domestic violence, being forced to use services in English brings additional challenges in their efforts to live a life free of violence and puts them at risk of staying longer with a violent spouse.

“I asked for a lawyer... I was given an English-speaking lawyer and she represented me at the first meeting with my ex-husband; it was like some kind of agreement before going to court and I didn’t understand anything. Everything was in English... The decision was made... Decisions were made, and I didn’t know that it wasn’t just a simple chat, while this was a crucial moment in my life.”

*- Testimonial, Eva**

**Please note names have been changed to protect identity.*

“At the transition house, I think it would have been good if there had been a Francophone, because the place was so immersed in emotions, in stress, worry, fear and doubt, that it would have been a really good thing to be able to express myself without needing to convey all this into another language.”
- Testimonial, Dominique*

In their current situation, Francophone women from OLMCs should be viewed as a group of people who are marginalized and underserved because its language rights are protected at the federal level but not at provincial level. Their safety and that of their children is the responsibility of provincial or territorial institutions. Understanding this language-based identity issue is essential to understanding how the lack of provincially-delivered services for the specific needs of Francophone women runs counter to an intersectional and culturally responsive approach.

Francophone women experiencing violence are also often unrecognized and unidentified in specifically French-speaking organizations. In these organizations, the issue of violence itself is often invisible, often due to a lack of training and tools to identify violence, or to a lack of knowledge on violence-related issues, as well as to cultural barriers.

Most of the Francophone organizations that welcome Francophones do not have the training needed to identify situations where violence is occurring, to ask the appropriate questions and to act accordingly. For example, when the settlement workers were consulted about violence, several of them acknowledged that they were not “equipped”, that they “did not try to search any further”, out of lack of “means”, “experience”, “skills” and “encouragement”.

Additionally, the lack of resources to promote Francophone services often leads to a lack of awareness of the services available, particularly in an Anglophone province that does not bring to the fore the two official languages. Many Francophones and women communi-

cating in French do not know that they have access to some services in French (such as La Boussole or Réseau-Femmes C.-B.) as well as the right to interpretation services.

It is also important to note that some Francophone women experiencing violence do not reach out to Francophone organizations partly because of a lack of services; for fear of losing their anonymity; for fear of being judged; or because of mistrust—or a perception of the inadequacy—of these services.

“Francophone communities outside of Quebec are small, everybody knows everybody. I didn’t want it shouted from the rooftops and for everyone to know, so I preferred to remain more discreet. Everything was done in English.”

- Testimonial, Alex*

*Please note names have been changed to protect identity.

Economic dependency can also be a major obstacle. Poorly informed about their rights in British Columbia, many women, particularly Francophone women, are not aware of the services and compensation to which they are entitled for themselves and their children.

"I don't have any money, I have nothing because he was making sure I would have nothing at the end of the month, so that I would never be able to leave, so I had nothing on me. I was always buying the things my child needed and there was nothing left for me."

*- Testimonial, Julie**

Domestic violence and the lack of access to services in French cannot not be seen as two separate issues, since it is specifically the combination of these two realities that places women in a precarious and dangerous situation. Their double invisibility, belonging to a specific linguistic and cultural community, fear and shame associated with asking for help and the lack of knowledge about the available services are all factors that play a part in putting women and their children in situations that are detrimental to their well-being.

CONCLUSION

This review made possible by the 'Moving Forward Together' project has allowed us to identify the barriers that women from official minority language communities (OMLC) face when experiencing violence.

On the one hand, community organizations that offer specific services for women experiencing violence do not feel an obligation to offer services in French because the province has no policy or law regarding French services. Many non-Francophone organizations readily assume that if clients can express themselves well enough in English to call on them for services, there is no need to try to meet their needs in their mother tongue or first language. This leads to a lack of awareness of the specific needs of French-speaking women experiencing violence and to a significant loss of information for women who are not perfectly fluent in English.

On the other hand, Francophone organizations are often unaware of the reality of women in violent situations, which results in a lack of services appropriate to their needs. This review reveals a lack of training and tools for settlement officers and employees of Francophone community organizations to deal with the realities of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NATIONAL LEVEL

- Consultation and collaboration of national Francophone organizations in response to the urgent need to act to protect women and girls experiencing violence in British Columbia.
- Commitment by national advocacy organizations working in anti-violence sectors to recognize jurisdictional inconsistencies, and to work toward putting in place initiatives that will give Francophone women equal access to a continuum of services.
- Evaluation of reporting and accountability mechanisms for greater transparency, in relation to Part VII of the Official Languages Act, in the funding for provincial and national organizations.

PROVINCIAL LEVEL

- Recognition of the urgent and fundamental need to provide support in French to women experiencing violence.
- Recurring funding for a referral and support service for Francophone women experiencing violence, integrated into a majority language organization.
- Collaboration between Francophone associations, organizations from the anti-violence sector as well as from government departments to develop strategic measures to serve Francophone women experiencing violence.
- Commitment by organizations in the anti-violence sector to provide culturally appropriate services in French.