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THE PROJECT TO END  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**A SUMMARY OF THE PUBLIC'S  
PERCEPTIONS OF DOMESTIC  
AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN  
ALBERTA**

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## An important note from the authors

Shift's purpose is to advance effective *primary* prevention strategies. For ten years we have dedicated ourselves to conducting research with diverse stakeholders to create the social conditions that stop violence before it starts – at home, across the country, and around the world. In 2020, we partnered with IMPACT (a provincial collective impact initiative to eradicate domestic and sexual violence in Alberta) to develop a series of papers and training modules that will ultimately support the design and implementation of a primary prevention framework for Alberta.

The goal of our partnership is work with systems, institutions, and the human service sector so we can disrupt the status quo by making visible the ways in which our current laws, systems, structures, culture and practices, both intentionally and unintentionally, perpetuate the oppression of those impacted by domestic and sexual violence. This is particularly important for people who are marginalized due to other interconnected social issues such as poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, among others. Our role in this project is to conduct and translate research, mobilize knowledge, and facilitate robust discussions through an anti-oppressive and gender-transformative lens.

The goal of this particular research project was to conduct a literature review to better understand existing public perceptions of the issues of domestic violence and sexual violence in Alberta so we can start to strategize on how we can evolve public opinion towards prevention. This paper provides foundational knowledge articulating the current state and gaps in knowledge along with opportunities that we need to engage in to start shifting public perceptions and attitudes on eradicating domestic and sexual violence in Alberta.

This report can be found on our website: <https://preventdomesticviolence.ca>

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## 1.0 Introduction

In 2019, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence (Shift) at the University of Calgary partnered with IMPACT – a provincial collective impact initiative, to prevent domestic and sexual violence in Alberta. The goal of this particular research project was to conduct a literature review to better understand existing public perceptions of the issues of domestic violence (DV) and sexual violence (SV) in Alberta so we can start to strategize on how we can evolve public opinion towards prevention. Public perceptions in this paper are defined as the *aggregate of individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, typically expressed by a significant proportion of the community*.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.0 Methods

This study examines public perceptions of DV and SV in Alberta as measured through scales, polls, and surveys that have been used within the last fifteen years (see Appendix A for definitions of each). The literature search involved screening academic and grey literature using relevant search terms in both Google and the EBSCO Information Services platform.

We conducted a three-step screening process that involved identifying tools that met inclusion criteria, gathering input from IMPACT members, and conducting an advanced screening of the literature to ensure inclusion and exclusion criteria were met. The search resulted in 8 instruments being included in the analysis (Table 1).

The instruments that passed the screening exercise to be included were analyzed to understand the perceptions of DV and SV in Alberta, as well as more nuanced findings on the perceptions of Albertans from different ages. A special focus was given to male perceptions of DV/SV, perceptions of violence in the workplace, and perceptions of elder abuse in Alberta. Finally, one municipal survey was reviewed in detail to determine the extent to which public perceptions at the municipal level align with perceptions at the provincial and national levels.

See Appendix A for a detailed outline of the reports and studies included in the analysis, and please see Appendix B for a detailed description of methodology.

**Table 1: Reports and studies included in the analysis**

#	Title of the Instrument/Study	Year	Author/Publisher	Focus	Sample size	Method	Location	Gender	Age group	Brief description
1	Albertans' Perceptions of Bullying, Family Violence and Elder Abuse	2018	Advanis on behalf of the Government of Alberta	Family violence; elder abuse	1,603	Computer-aided telephone interviewing and web survey	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	The goal of this study was to understand public perceptions of family violence and bullying in Alberta.
2	Awareness and Perceptions of Elder Abuse with Specific Attention to Financial Abuse	2009	Ekos Research for Justice Canada	Family violence; elder abuse (including sexual abuse)	3,002	Telephone survey	Canada (with Alberta sample)	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	The goal of this study was to understand the Canadian public's awareness and perceptions of elder abuse, with specific attention to financial abuse.
3	Men's Attitudes and Behaviours Toward Violence Against Women	2019	Leger on behalf of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	DV (including SV)	1,454	Telephone survey	Alberta	Male	Adults (18+)	The goal was to understand perceptions of domestic violence, perceptions and attitudes towards violence against women and perceptions of the role men play in reducing and preventing violence.
4	The Alberta Men's Survey: A Conversation with Men about Well-being and Healthy Relationships	2016	Alberta Men's Network	Men's wellbeing and healthy relationships without violence	2,214	Online survey and in-person survey	Alberta	Male	Adults (18+)	The goal was to understand men's sense of well-being and capacities to build and sustain healthy relationships, in particular to understand what it means to be a man, what masculinity pressures are, and men's help-seeking strategies.
5	Addressing Family Violence in Airdrie: Environmental Scan	2017	Synergy Research Group; The City of Airdrie	DV; family violence	555	Focus group with service-providers and community online survey	Airdrie, AB	Male & Female	Youth (under 18) and Adults (18+)	The City of Airdrie commissioned this study in the Spring of 2016 to learn about prevalence, perceptions and influencing factors regarding the social issue of domestic violence within its community.

#	Title of the Instrument/Study	Year	Author/Publisher	Focus	Sample size	Method	Location	Gender	Age group	Brief description
6	LGBTQ2+ Youth Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence	2018	Wisdom2Action for the Public Health Agency of Canada	LGBTQ2+ youth experiences with gender-based violence	500	Online survey, Twitter chat,	Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto	LGBTQ 2+ Male & Female	Youth (12-29)	Wisdom2Action organized 4 youth consultations across Canada that provided an opportunity for young people to engage in deeper discussions related to LGBTQ2+ youth and gender-based violence, through the creative facilitation approach employed by W2A youth facilitators. Findings include results about perceptions of LGBTQ2+ identities.
7	Violence and the Workplace survey	2019	Leger on behalf of Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	SV and DV	1,208	Online interviews	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	Leger was contracted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to measure several aspects concerning Violence and the Workplace. The research refers to the 2009 baseline survey of employed Albertans that was done to understand Albertans' experience and perspectives on workplace violence and on family violence impacting the workplace.
8	Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Childhood Sexual Abuse in Alberta	2020	Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services	SV	1,512	Telephone survey	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	In partnership with the Government of Alberta, AASAS undertook research to provide insight into the prevalence and nature of Albertans' experiences of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault throughout their lifetime. Study includes questions on perceptions and awareness of sexual assault and abuse.

## 3.0 Findings

### 3.1 Understanding perceptions of family violence in Alberta

Findings from one report (Advanis, 2018) are discussed in this section.

#### *Awareness of family violence:*

Research shows that 56 percent of Albertans recall reading, seeing, or hearing any information about the prevention of family violence in the past 12 months and 74 percent of those who recall information agree they are now better able to help.<sup>2</sup> Further, 75 percent of Albertans report that family violence exists in their community “a fair bit” or “a lot.”<sup>3</sup> When asked to identify behaviours in family violence, 44 percent of Albertans mentioned physical abuse first and 19 percent mentioned emotional and psychological abuse first.<sup>4</sup> Worth noting is that 73 percent of respondents mentioned physical abuse and 70 percent of respondents mentioned emotional and psychological abuse when asked to describe family violence.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Awareness of family violence behaviours:*

Research also shows that Albertans’ understanding of non-physical violence has increased since 2016. Specifically, Albertans exhibited a 9 to 22 percent increased agreement (from 2016 to 2018) that the following behaviours are family violence: “preventing adult family member from knowing about or accessing family income”; “stalking; preventing women in the family from working outside the home”; “taking a disabled relative’s money, belongings, or property without the person’s knowledge or full consent”; and “threatening to commit suicide if partner leaves.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *Perceptions of help to address family violence:*

49 percent of Albertans report that getting help to address family violence is “easy,” with “many resources” being the most mentioned reason for the ease of receiving support.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the most mentioned reason for difficulties receiving support were stigma and shame.<sup>8</sup> When asked to identify who they would turn to for support, 32 percent of Albertans mentioned police first and 24 percent of Albertans mentioned family first.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 Understanding perceptions of sexual violence in Alberta

Findings from one report (Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, 2020) are discussed in this section.

#### *Beliefs about the seriousness of the issue:*

57 percent of Albertans agree or strongly agree that the average Albertan resident believes that sexual abuse is an issue in their community, with females more likely to agree with this statement than men (63 percent compared to 50 percent of males).<sup>10</sup>

#### *Support for survivors of sexual violence:*

40 percent of Albertans believe there are not enough supports for survivors of SV, while 29 percent believe that there are.<sup>11</sup> Females are more likely to indicate that it is “difficult” or “very difficult” for

someone to get help for SV in their communities (65 percent of females compared to 51 percent of males).<sup>12</sup>

Albertans believe that the “most common type of support that should be available to survivors of child sexual abuse is access to counseling or mental health services (44%).”<sup>13</sup> Further, “females are more likely to identify the need for supports that address the trauma or impact of sexual abuse survivors, while males were more likely to identify the need for stronger penalties for abusers”.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.3 Understanding men’s perceptions of domestic violence in Alberta**

Findings from two reports (Leger, 2019a and Alberta Men’s Network, 2016) are discussed in this section, with a significant majority of the discussion drawing on the first report.

#### *Attitudes towards gender equity:*

Since 2012, Albertan men have shown increasing agreement with statements related to gender equity, including statements about women’s ability to be political leaders, women’s rights to jobs in a scarce market, the importance of university education for both girls and boys, and men and women’s roles within the household, among others.<sup>15</sup> Increasing agreement with statements related to gender equality is reflected as an increase in gender equity scores in the study included in this review. Further, four in five Albertan men are aware of the #MeToo movement and “those who are aware tend to have higher gender equity scores and more desirable attitudes about domestic violence and violence against women”.<sup>16</sup>

Research also indicates that Albertan men (93 to 95 percent) agree that physical assault is never acceptable regardless of the situation (i.e., if a woman “makes him look stupid or insults him in front of his friends,” “refuses to have sex with him,” “admits to having sex with another man,” and “argues with or refuses to obey him.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, virtually all Albertan men (98 percent) believe that men can personally make a difference in promoting healthy, respectful, and non-violent relationships.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Attitudes about victims:*

The included studies show that 39 percent of Albertan men believe “women rarely make false claims of being raped,” however, 36 percent of men believe that “if a woman wears provocative clothing, she’s putting herself at risk of rape”.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Awareness of non-physical violence:*

Findings from studies included in this review show that although men do not always consider each example of non-physical violence to be domestic violence, they believe these behaviours are serious.<sup>20</sup> As examples, Albertan men report the following situations as serious: a parent harms their child as a way to scare or control the other parent, one partner tries to scare/control the other by threatening to hurt other family members, or one partner controls the other by withholding money.

*Perceptions of women’s ability to leave violent relationships:*

The study showed that 59 percent of Albertan men strongly agree that “it’s hard to understand why women stay in an abusive relationship,” and half of Albertan men agree that “most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to.”<sup>21</sup>

*Beliefs about the role of language, popular culture, and media in normalizing violence against women:*

95 percent of Albertan men agree that violence against women and girls is a concern to them.<sup>22</sup> However, only 58 percent are concerned about sexist language and the sexualization of women in media and popular culture, and how these factors help to normalize violence against women.<sup>23</sup>

*Attitudes about intervening:*

While 90 percent of men state that they believe they would be likely to intervene if they knew a victim of domestic violence, relatively fewer state they have taken action in a public context (i.e., 68 percent approached the victim to “see if she was okay or needed help” and 14 percent reported the incident to police.)<sup>24</sup> These findings suggest that many men hold “the attitude that domestic violence is best dealt with privately, or lack knowledge and skills to intervene in a public situation”.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the fact that virtually all Albertan men (98 percent) believe that men can personally make a difference in promoting healthy, respectful, and non-violent relationships in one study, many Albertan men stated in another study that they were “unsure” if they could “contribute to men’s wellbeing and healthy relationships without violence.” In the latter case, “some men [felt] as though they [were not] qualified or permitted to take action on the issues identified.”<sup>26</sup>

### **3.4 Understanding perceptions of violence in the workplace in Alberta**

Findings from one report (Leger, 2019b) are discussed in this section. This survey looked at two issues: violence that happens at the workplace and the ways in which home violence impacts the workplace.

*Beliefs about the seriousness of the workplace violence:*

More than four in five Albertans agree that violence in the workplace is an issue that must be understood and addressed (89 percent), and that workplace violence should be a priority of the Alberta Government (83 percent).<sup>27</sup> Albertans also agree that violence in the workplace should be addressed by many parties, with police and the justice system (94 percent) and employers (92 percent) at the top of the list for those who should be most responsible for addressing the issue.<sup>28</sup>

Despite general support for addressing workplace violence, when asked about different forms of violence in the workplace, the majority of Albertans disagree that they are issues impacting their workplace (i.e., 81 percent disagree that sexual violence and 76 percent disagree that sexual harassment are problems impacting their workplace, while 73 percent disagree that family/domestic violence is a problem impacting their workplace.)<sup>29</sup>

*Awareness of policies to prevent and address workplace violence:*

Only one in five (21%) of Albertans are aware of the "new rules" under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act that focus on preventing workplace harassment and violence and addressing incidents when they occur.<sup>30</sup> Albertans also report that their "workplace does not offer (or are not aware of what it offers) in terms of taking corrective action for workplace violence, or of the benefits that are available to employees who are victims."<sup>31</sup> Further, only 15% of Albertans have noticed a change at work as a result of these new rules and many of those who felt they "noticed a change" couldn't identify what was different (41 percent).<sup>32</sup>

*Beliefs about the connection between family violence/DV and the workplace:*

The majority of Albertans (more often women than men) strongly agree that violence occurring at home can impact many aspects of the workplace, with a recognition that employee morale and safety are significantly impacted by violence occurring at home. Although more than half of Albertans indicate that their workplace has policies in place for workplace violence, bullying/harassment, and sexual violence, "the majority do not know (or are unaware) if their workplace has a policy to address and prevent family/domestic violence".<sup>33</sup> Further, "57 percent of Albertans have received at least some type of training to address and prevent violence in the workplace, while only 20 percent have received training on addressing and preventing domestic violence".<sup>34</sup>

### **3.5 Understanding perceptions of elder abuse in Alberta**

Findings from two reports (Advanis, 2018 and EKOS Research Associate, 2009) are discussed in this section.

*Awareness of elder abuse:*

Overall, Canadians report that they are aware of "elder abuse," with more than 8 in 10 Canadians (82 percent) indicating they are aware of the term.<sup>35</sup> At the provincial level, Albertans report a 7 to 8 percent increased agreement that they read, saw, or heard information about elder abuse resources (compared to 2016).<sup>36</sup> Further, Canadians estimate the rate of elder abuse (in general) to be 40 per cent on average.<sup>37</sup> Despite this estimate being considerably higher than the ten per cent rate of victimization captured in the most recent General Social Survey (GSS),<sup>38</sup> this gap is explained by research that shows that most events of domestic violence are not reported.<sup>39</sup>

*Perceptions about the kinds of abuse experienced by elders:*

When asked, without prompts, to name the kinds of abuse that elders might experience, research at the national level shows that physical abuse tops the list (mentioned by 49 percent of respondents), followed by neglect (44 percent), emotional/psychological/verbal abuse (38 percent), and financial abuse (21 percent).<sup>40</sup> However, when provided a list and asked to indicate the most and least common abuse perpetrated against elders, neglect came out on top (36 percent), followed by psychological/emotional abuse (26 percent) and financial abuse (23 percent).<sup>41</sup> Only 1 percent of respondents in this study think sexual abuse is the most common type of abuse experienced by elders.<sup>42</sup> Results from another study (conducted at the provincial level) shows that Albertans

generally mention emotional/psychological abuse and financial abuse, first, when asked to name elder abuse behaviours.<sup>43</sup>

*Perceptions about perpetrators of elder abuse:*

Public perceptions about perpetrators of elder abuse are generally in line with police-reported data<sup>44</sup>: Canadians perceive that elders are most likely victimized by someone they know, naming the main perpetrators of elder abuse as a family member other than a spouse (62 percent) and paid caregivers in institutions (46 percent).<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the vast majority of Canadians are not caring for an elderly household member (93 percent).<sup>46</sup> Canadians are most likely to consider a spouse (26 percent) to be the *least* likely to engage in elder abuse.

*Beliefs about supports for elder abuse:*

Albertans increased their mention that they would turn to diverse supports to address family and elder abuse, including social workers (23 percent increased mention), doctors/medical professionals (33 percent increase), someone in the family (12 percent increase), a friend (22 percent increase), a telephone help line (11 percent increase), and a faith leader (5 percent increase).<sup>47</sup>

*Differences in elder abuse perceptions based on gender, age group, and region in Canada:*

- Women respondents are more familiar with the term “elder abuse” (87 percent of women compared to 77 percent of men)<sup>48</sup>, and men are less likely than women to “consider various actions as elder abuse”.<sup>49</sup>
- Compared to previous years, people 18 to 34 years old report a decrease in reading, seeing, or hearing information about elder abuse prevention and a decrease in their agreement that they are better able to help in elder abuse situations.<sup>50</sup>
- Compared to other provinces, Albertans (87 percent) are most likely to be aware of the term “elder abuse.”<sup>51</sup>
- Albertans report the second highest rates of exposure to family violence (29 percent) in Canada, with British Columbia reporting the highest rates of exposure at 31 percent.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.6 Understanding perceptions of family violence at a municipal level**

This section discusses findings from one report (Synergy Research Group, 2017). This survey focused specifically on the perceptions of people in The City of Airdrie.

*Beliefs about the seriousness of the issue:*

Research shows that 89 percent of people from Airdrie believe that it is important that the issue of family violence be addressed in Airdrie.<sup>53</sup> Women in Airdrie are more likely than men to think the issue of family violence is important (85 percent compared to 77 percent of males).<sup>54</sup>

Community members are likely to assign less importance to addressing family violence if they have not had personal experience or do not know someone who has experienced it. The majority of people in Airdrie (56 percent) know someone, or have personally experienced family violence while living in Airdrie.<sup>55</sup>

*Beliefs about help for family violence:*

Those who had experienced or knew someone who experienced family violence were asked whether they or the person tried to get help to deal with family violence. 30 percent indicated that they or the person did not look for help.<sup>56</sup> Reasons for not seeking help centred around a “lack of Airdrie-based services,” “fear for her safety,” “felt she could manage on her own and did not ask for help,” and “stigma/shame/embarrassment,” among others.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, just 10 percent of people in Airdrie believe there is enough help, half believe more help is required, and 40 percent of the survey respondents are uncertain or do not know.<sup>58</sup> Women are more likely than men to indicate that there is not enough help (49 percent compared to 22 percent of men), while men are more likely than women to say that there is enough help (22 percent compared to 6 percent of women).<sup>59</sup>

When asked where they would go for help with family violence, 47 percent of people from Airdrie said the RCMP, 20 percent said Community Links, 15 percent said a shelter in Calgary or other Calgary services, and 10 percent said family and friends.<sup>60</sup>

When asked to indicate the type of help that was needed but was not available, people from Airdrie provided the following recommendations: 1) a safe place that is locally based or a shelter or safe affordable housing; 2) general counselling and supports for women and their children; 3) financial supports and assistance to help manage the transition away from abusive relationships; 4) a more consistent and compassionate response from RCMP; and 5) affordable or free legal assistance and advice for victims of family violence.<sup>61</sup>

### **3.7 Understanding the perceptions of family/domestic, sexual, elder, and workplace violence in Alberta in different age groups**

Most surveys included in this review do not disaggregate data clearly by age. The following sections provide a high-level summary of findings from seven of the included studies.

#### **3.7.1 Youth under 17 years old**

Two surveys included youth under 17 years old (Wisdom2Action, 2018 and Synergy Research Group, 2017). Only 3 percent of respondents in the first survey ( $n=555$ ) represented youth, while 39 percent of respondents in the second survey ( $n=500$ ) represented youth.

Both surveys presented significant limitations for this review. First, youth were under-represented in the first survey. Second, data in the first survey was not disaggregated to specifically analyze the perceptions of youth. Third, the second survey, despite high representation of youth, had a limited focus on understanding their perceptions of domestic and sexual violence.

Due to these limitations, conclusions cannot be drawn from the research included in this review, about the perceptions of sexual and domestic violence among youth under 17 years old.

### 3.7.2 Young adults 18 to 34 years old

All surveys included in this review collected data from individuals in this age group. However, some of the surveys stratified the age groups differently so findings from this age group may overlap with findings from other adult categories.

Awareness of family violence and elder abuse:

- Compared to 2016<sup>1</sup>, people 18 to 34 years old report a decrease in reading, seeing, or hearing information about family violence and elder abuse prevention.<sup>62</sup>
- Compared to 2016<sup>2</sup>, people 18 to 34 years old report a decreased likelihood to agree that they are better able to help in family violence and elder abuse situations.<sup>63</sup>
- Compared to 2016<sup>3</sup>, people 18 to 34 years old report an increased likelihood that they would seek help from family and friends in family violence and elder abuse situations.<sup>64</sup>
- Compared to other age groups, people younger than 25 years old are less aware of the term “elder abuse” (66 percent compared to 70 percent for people 25-44 years old; 90 percent for people 45-64 years old; and 86 percent for people 65 years old and older).<sup>65</sup>

Perceptions about the most prevalent forms of elder abuse differ among age groups:

- A belief that neglect is the most common form of elder abuse is more prevalent among younger Canadians (43 percent between the ages of 25 to 44 believe it is the most prevalent versus 26 percent of seniors). In comparison, older Canadians are more likely to name psychological/emotional abuse as the most prevalent form of elder abuse (36 percent of respondents over the age of 65 versus 21 percent of the 25 to 44 age cohort).<sup>66</sup>
- 80 percent of people 25 to 44 years old think sexual abuse is the least likely form of elder abuse compared to 66 percent of those over the age of 65 years.<sup>67</sup>
- The prevalence of financial abuse of seniors is rated lower on average by men (35%) and seniors (33 percent). By comparison, prevalence of financial abuse of seniors is rated higher on average by women (40%) and those younger than 25 years of age (42%).<sup>68</sup>

Witnessing violence against women:

- One in five men have witnessed another man abusing/harassing a woman in public in the past year. Most (68%) checked on the victim, and one in seven reported the incident to police. There were a higher percentage of men indicating that they have witnessed a man using abusive/harassing behaviour in the 18–34 year age group, Aboriginal men, men who reside in Edmonton and Fort McMurray as well as those who agree that violence against women is a concern.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This survey did not indicate percentage change between 2016 and 2018. If there is interest, Shift may follow-up with the Government of Alberta for more information.

<sup>2</sup> This survey did not indicate the percentage change between 2016 and 2018.

<sup>3</sup> This survey did not indicate the percentage change between 2016 and 2018.

Workplace violence:

- Sexual harassment and sexual violence were more likely to be noted as problems in their place of work for those aged 18 to 34.<sup>70</sup>
- People 18 to 34 years old report higher agreement that violence in the workplace is an issue that must be understood and addressed, and should be a priority of the Alberta government.<sup>71</sup>

### **3.7.3. Older adults 35 to 64 years old**

Seven surveys included in this review collected data from individuals in this age group (Advanis, 2018; EKOS Research, 2009; Leger, 2019a; Alberta Men’s Network, 2016; Synergy Research Group, 2017; Leger, 2019b; Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, 2020). However, some of the surveys stratified the age groups differently so findings from this age group may overlap with findings from other adult categories.

Violence against women and gender equity:

- 90 percent of Albertan men state they are likely to intervene if a family member/friend is a victim of domestic violence. These men are more likely to be 35 to 54 years of age.<sup>72</sup>
- Gender equity scores are higher among Calgarians, those in Central and Southern Alberta, and among men aged 35 and older.<sup>73</sup>

Workplace violence:

- Disagreement with the statement that violence impacts the workplace is higher among Albertans who are aged 34 to 55 and identify as women.<sup>74</sup>

### **3.7.4. Seniors 65 years old and older**

Seven surveys included in this review collected data from individuals in this age group (Advanis, 2018; EKOS Research, 2009; Leger, 2019a; Alberta Men’s Network, 2016; Synergy Research Group, 2017; Leger, 2019b; Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, 2020). However, some of the surveys stratified the age groups differently so findings from this age group may overlap with findings from other adult categories.

Awareness of elder abuse:

- Compared to 2016<sup>4</sup>, people 65 years old and older report an increase in reading, seeing, or hearing information about the prevention of family violence and elder abuse.<sup>75</sup>
- Compared to 2016<sup>5</sup>, people 65 years old and older report increased likelihood to agree that they are better able to help in a family violence and elder abuse situation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This survey did not indicate percentage change between 2016 and 2018. If there is interest, Shift may follow-up with the Government of Alberta for more information.

<sup>5</sup> This survey did not indicate percentage change between 2016 and 2018.

- Compared to 2016<sup>6</sup>, people 65 years old and older report decreased likelihood that they would turn to family in family violence or elder abuse situations.<sup>77</sup>
- Compared to people 25 years old and younger, older adults and seniors are more aware of the term “elder abuse” (86 percent for people 45 to 64 years old and 96 percent for people 65 years old and older, compared to 66 percent compared of people 25 years old and younger).<sup>78</sup>
- The belief that seniors are least likely to be abused by their spouse declines with age (35 percent of young adults think that spouses are the least likely to engage in this behaviour versus 19 percent of seniors themselves).<sup>79</sup>

## 4.0 Discussion

This section includes a summary of gaps and opportunities identified through the research and from one consultation with IMPACT member’s in June 2020. It is important to note that our research was limited to eight surveys. Of these, two surveys were extremely brief in their discussion on perceptions about DV and SV in Alberta. IMPACT members should consider these limitations during their review of the following section and approach our recommendations and findings as a springboard for further research and discussion.

### 4.1 Beliefs about domestic and sexual violence are not translating to changes in behaviours and practice

Despite overall supportive attitudes towards preventing and addressing DV and SV, it appears that these attitudes are not effectively translating into meaningful changes in communities, workplaces, and individual behaviours. For example, only 15% of Albertans have noticed a change at work as a result of new rules under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act, which focuses on preventing workplace harassment and violence, and on addressing incidents when they occur. Further, many of those who felt they "noticed a change" couldn't identify what was different (41 percent).<sup>80</sup>

The establishment of workplace policies to prevent and address violence is critical, but additional research is required to understand the extent to which these policies are changing the culture (i.e., beliefs, norms, structures, practices, environments, and behaviours) of the workplace setting. For example, despite general support for addressing workplace violence, the majority of Albertans disagree that sexual violence (81 percent), sexual harassment (76 percent), and family/domestic violence (73 percent) are problems impacting their workplace.<sup>81</sup> This contradiction points to beliefs that, “Workplace violence is a problem, but it is not a problem in *my* workplace.” Building a workplace culture that believes that workplace violence is *everyone’s* problem may be an effective approach to ensure policies translate into everyday practice.

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<sup>6</sup> This survey did not indicate percentage change between 2016 and 2018.

## 4.2 There is an emerging understanding of coercive control in Alberta

Although most Albertans tend to think immediately about physical abuse when asked to describe family violence behaviours, the research also shows that Albertans' understanding of non-physical violence has increased since 2016. For example, Albertans believe that preventing an adult family member from knowing about or accessing family income; stalking; preventing women in the family from working outside the home; taking a disabled relative's money, belongings, or property without the person's knowledge or full consent; and threatening to commit suicide if a partner leaves, are forms of family violence.<sup>82</sup>

Research on elder abuse show similar findings, where respondents named neglect, emotional, psychological, verbal, and financial abuse as being the top forms of violence against elders.<sup>83</sup> The study on men's perspectives of violence against women included in this review also highlight men's growing awareness of the seriousness of non-physical violence such as one parent using children to control the other parent, threatening to hurt other family members in order to control the partner, and withholding money from a partner.<sup>84</sup>

Taken together, these findings are encouraging and indicate Albertans' growing understanding of the complexity of DV, including the role of power, coercion, and control in abuse. Efforts to prevent and address DV and SV should build on this emerging understanding among the public. One way to help achieve this could be through the adoption and implementation of the coercive control model within the domestic violence and sexual violence sectors.

The coercive control model analyzes the ways in which research, theory, intervention, and advocacy within the domestic violence field narrowly focus on physical violence within relationships, thereby overlooking or ignoring altogether the role of power and control within violent relationships. A coercive control model<sup>85</sup> argues that domestic violence is a "strategic course of self-interested behaviour designed to secure and expand gender-based privilege by establishing a regime of domination in personal life."<sup>86</sup> This definition incorporates five facets of women's experience of domestic violence that are obscured by the current model guiding the domestic violence sector<sup>87</sup>:

1. Abuse is ongoing rather than incident-specific.
2. Abuse involves frequent, even routine, but generally low-level assault.
3. Abuse includes a range of tactics in addition to physical force.
4. Abuse is often subtle and difficult to see.
5. Resulting harms are cumulative.

Adoption of the coercive control model within the domestic violence sector may build on the public's emerging understanding of the impacts of non-physical violence on victims and thus increase their support for laws, programs, and supports that more appropriately respond to the realities of domestic violence victims. *It is important to note that a review of the coercive control literature shows that the relationship between coercive control and sexual violence is not yet explicitly examined, highlighting the need to further explore how the model can be strengthened to support the prevention of domestic and sexual violence in Alberta.*

To learn more about the coercive control model, visit <https://preventdomesticviolence> and read, “Building a case for using ‘Coercive Control’ in Alberta: Discussion paper.”

### 4.3 We need focused attention on changing the attitudes and behaviours of men in Alberta

Overall, key findings offer an encouraging picture of Albertan men’s perspectives on domestic violence and violence against women: men show increasing agreement with statements related to gender equity, most men believe that physical assault is never acceptable regardless of the situation, and virtually all Albertan men (98 percent) believe that men can personally make a difference in promoting healthy, respectful, and non-violent relationships.<sup>88</sup> However, the study included in this review, which focused specifically on men’s perceptions of violence against women, also shows that there is significant room for continued improvement in several areas, which are briefly described below.

#### *Rape myth and victim-blaming attitudes:*

Although the majority of Albertan men *do not* believe that women make false claims about rape, a significant portion of men do (39 percent).<sup>89</sup> Further, 36 percent of men believe that a woman is putting herself at risk of rape when she wears provocative clothing.<sup>90</sup> These findings point to a need to continue to work with Albertan men to correct rape myths and address victim-blaming attitudes.

#### *Coercive control:*

Findings show that although men do not consider each example of controlling or coercive behaviour as “always” domestic violence, they believe these behaviours are serious.<sup>91</sup> Men’s awareness of the seriousness of coercive and controlling behaviour, while inadequate, is a valuable springboard to support them in identifying these behaviours as forms of domestic violence with severe negative impacts. An understanding about the nuances and impacts of coercive control may help men to understand why women may stay in violent relationships, as the research shows this is an area in need of greater attention. Included in this work are efforts to support men in understanding how coercive control entraps women in violent relationships through tactics like isolation, exploitation or deprivation of their resources, regulating their everyday behavior, humiliation, threats, and intimidation.<sup>92</sup>

#### *Language, popular culture, and media:*

Although 95 percent of Albertan men agree that violence against women and girls is a concern to them, they are less concerned about sexist language and the sexualization of women in media and popular culture and that they help to normalize violence against women (58 percent).<sup>93</sup> This data suggests that greater attention should be placed on supporting men to understand the gap between their general, abstract beliefs about violence against women and girls, and the drivers and causes of this violence (i.e., socialization including language, popular culture, and media). An understanding of this connection may help men to notice when they are absorbing these messages and result in men interrupting or changing situations where sexist and problematic messages are showing up in their environments and social circles.

*Taking action:*

While most men state that they believe they are likely to intervene if they knew a victim of domestic violence, relatively fewer state they have taken action in a public context. This suggests that general attitudes about gender equality and intentions to address violence do not always translate into actual behaviours conducive to these beliefs. In fact, intention to behave in a certain way translates to actual behaviour change only 27 to 39 percent of the time.<sup>94</sup> Policies, programs, and practices need to identify and implement approaches that bridge this attitude-behaviour gap.

Attention to these areas is critical because this review shows that perceptions of DV and SV are gendered. For example, women are more likely than men to think that family violence, elder abuse, workplace violence, and sexual violence are serious issues. Women are more likely than men to believe that violence occurring at home can impact many aspects of the workplace, and women are more likely than men to indicate that there is not enough help for people experiencing violence in the home and at work. Clearly, perceptions of DV and SV are gendered, which is not surprising when understood within the broader context of violence against women: The vast majority of victims of police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada are females<sup>95</sup>, and on average every 2.5 days one woman or girl is killed in Canada.<sup>96</sup> The study affirms the need to continue to support men to develop attitudes and behaviours that reinforce and advance gender equality.

At the same time, some men are victimized by women<sup>97</sup> and boys are exposed to and experience violence.<sup>98</sup> Achieving gender equality, therefore, will require a comprehensive approach that targets social and cultural norms, structures, institutions, policies, practices, and individual skills. These efforts need to support people of all genders to learn, adapt, and change their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. It will take people from all backgrounds, collectively, to promote gender equality.

#### **4.4 We need to strengthen the public's perceptions about the seriousness of sexual violence**

The majority (57 percent) of Albertans believe that sexual abuse and workplace violence are serious issues that need to be prevented and addressed. However, we need to understand why 43 percent of Albertans *do not* agree that sexual violence is a serious issue. When compared to family violence and workplace violence (which includes sexual violence in the workplace), where 89 percent of Albertans agree they are serious issues,<sup>99</sup> it appears that Albertans are not aware of the prevalence and impacts of SV. This needs to be addressed, as research shows that 45 percent of Albertans have experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime.<sup>100</sup> Further, 34 percent of Albertans were sexually abused under the age of 18 and 28 percent of Albertans have been sexually assaulted as adults.<sup>101</sup> Females report significantly higher rates of sexual assault, and “the number of people impacted by sexual abuse has grown significantly since 1984.”<sup>102</sup>

Clearly, sexual violence is a serious issue and we need to strengthen Albertans' perceptions around the gravity and pervasiveness, along with prevention strategies, to stop this form of abuse.

#### **4.5 We need to increase the public’s attention to sexual and spousal violence in elders**

Research shows that only 1 percent of respondents think that sexual abuse is the most common type of abuse experienced by elders.<sup>103</sup> Although some research shows that sexual abuse is indeed the least common type of elder abuse,<sup>104</sup> research also shows that elders who are divorced with low income have a higher risk of sexual or physical abuse.<sup>105</sup> Further, research shows that sexual abuse happens to elders residing in care facilities.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the public’s minimization of sexual abuse among elders needs further examination.

The vast majority of Canadians are not caring for an elderly household member (93 percent)<sup>107</sup>, which suggests that the vast majority of elders live in institutions. Due to the significant number of elders being cared for by professionals, there is a need research the nature, prevalence, and impact of elder abuse within institutional settings.

Lastly, Canadians are most likely to consider a spouse to be the *least* likely to engage in elder abuse (26 percent), yet “recent police data suggests that spouses are among the groups more likely to be involved in the victimization of seniors”<sup>108</sup> Greater attention should be placed on understanding the gap between public perceptions and the realities experience by many elders.

#### **4.6 The role of family and friends versus formal systems in assisting victims is mixed**

Surveys included in this review show that people are likely to turn to the police first for support for family violence; however, data from other research shows that the majority of people do not go to formal networks, and instead turn informal supports like family and friends.<sup>109</sup> Still, Albertans say that they are now more likely than in 2016 to turn to diverse supports to address family and elder abuse, including social workers, doctors/medical professionals, someone in the family, a friend, and a faith leader.<sup>110</sup> These findings suggest that, overall, efforts to increase awareness of elder abuse resources in Alberta have been effective and Albertans are increasingly open to reaching out to both professionals and informal supports.

Two surveys included in this review show that Albertans believe there are not enough supports for DV and SV, yet one survey showed that Albertans believe that getting help to address family violence is easy but noted that stigma and shame were the most significant barriers for reaching out for help. These mixed findings suggest two things: First, that a lack of family violence resources/programs/initiatives may not be the most significant barrier for receiving support. Perhaps instead, there is a need to transform cultural norms, values, and beliefs around family violence and support-seeking behaviours. Second, there may be a mismatch between the types of supports victims of DV and SV want and what is currently offered in the DV and SV sector.

Albertans believe that the “most common type of support that should be available to survivors of child sexual abuse is access to counseling or mental health services (44%)”<sup>111</sup>. Further, “females are more likely to identify the need for supports that address the trauma or impact of sexual abuse

survivors, while males were more likely to identify the need for stronger penalties for abusers”.<sup>112</sup> A deeper and more nuanced understanding of how gender impacts survivors’ desired goals when reaching out for support will help to ensure that policies, programs, and practices appropriately respond to the needs of survivors.

When asked where they would go for help with family violence, 47 percent of people from Airdrie said the RCMP, 20 percent said Community Links, 15 percent said a shelter in Calgary or other Calgary services, and 10 percent said family and friends.<sup>113</sup> These findings mirrored the actions of those who did seek help for family violence, which highlights the need to continue to provide training and resources to these various groups to ensure that they are able to offer appropriate, evidence-based support.

#### **4.7 We need segmented campaigns to change attitudes and perceptions**

Although conclusions about perceptions of DV and SV among people in different age-groups cannot be made based on data in this review, below are preliminary ideas for further exploration:

18 – 34 years old:

- Leverage family and friends to increase awareness and skills about family violence and elder abuse prevention among people in this age group.
- Increasing confidence and skills to intervene when witnessing abuse/harassment against women in public may be an effective strategy particularly for men 18 to 34 years old because they are most likely to witness this type of violence.
- Policies, programs, and practices that aim to prevent and address workplace violence should be developed with people (particularly women) 18 to 34 years old, as people in this age group express the highest levels of concern on this issue.
- Increasing awareness about elder abuse and strengthen young adults’ skills to address elder abuse.

35 – 54 years old:

- Interventions that raise awareness among men 35 to 54 years of age about the likelihood that their family member or friend is victim of domestic violence may motivate them to engage in violence prevention efforts.
- Research is required to understand why women aged 34 to 55 disagree with the statement that violence impacts the workplace.

65 years and older:

- Explore further why people 65 years and older are less likely to turn to their family in family violence and elder abuse situations, how this can be addressed appropriately, and/or how to engage better the informal supports that seniors would likely turn to for help.

## 5.0 Identified gaps in the research in Alberta

### 5.1. There is limited research on public perceptions about domestic and sexual violence

A thorough search of academic and grey literature, as well as consultation with key leaders in the DV/SV sector, showed that there is limited research on public perceptions about DV and SV in Alberta. While most of the surveys included in this review (i.e., EKOS Research, 2009; Leger, 2019a, Synergy Group Research, 2017; and Leger, 2019b) exclusively or largely examined public perceptions of DV and SV, the remaining surveys had a limited focus on this topic, relative to topics such as the prevalence and impacts of violence. More research to understand public perceptions about DV and SV may support government responses to DV and SV prevention and intervention: When public perceptions and opinions change, government responds in the direction of the demand, and it tends to do so quickly.<sup>114</sup> The DV and SV sector can leverage the influence of public perceptions to support changes in policy, services, and funding.

### 5.2 There is no common definition for domestic and sexual violence

Preventing and addressing DV and SV depends strongly on how the public understands these terms and concepts. However, only three surveys included in this review provided their working definition of domestic violence and/or sexual violence. Although there are common threads among the three definitions, there is an overall lack of cohesion and uniformity. Below are definitions used by the mentioned three surveys:

“Family violence can be defined as a wide range of abusive behaviours by one family member against another, or by one spouse or other intimate partner against another, that cause harm to that other person, whether it is physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial harm.”<sup>115</sup>

“Canadians have a quite expansive definition of family violence that goes well beyond traditional conceptions focusing on physical violence within the immediate family. While there is a broad consensus among Canadians that family violence refers to violence among immediate family members, including parent-adult child relationships, most Canadians also include violence occurring in a relationship of trust in their understanding of family violence (e.g., caregiver relationships).”<sup>116</sup>

“Domestic abuse or violence is defined as any use of physical or sexual force, actual or threatened, in an intimate relationship. It may include a single act of violence, or a number of acts forming a pattern of abuse through the use of assaultive and controlling behavior. The pattern of abuse may include: physical abuse; emotional abuse; psychological abuse; sexual abuse; criminal harassment (stalking); and threats to harm children, other family members, pets, and property.”<sup>117</sup>

If the DV and SV sector wishes to strengthen the public’s awareness and understanding of the issue, a common definition for DV and SV could assist these efforts.

### **5.3 There is a limited understanding of perceptions among marginalized groups**

Most surveys collected data on some aspects of respondents' identity (i.e., ethnicity, educational attainment, disability, gender identity, etc.); however, most data is provided in aggregated format with minimal information on the impact of diversity. For example, four surveys collected information about the ethnic background or nationality of respondents but none of them discussed the ways in which racism, colourism, immigration status, etc., may intersect with other aspects of respondents' identity to impact their perspectives of DV and SV.

Similarly, only three surveys collected data on the sexual orientation or gender identity of respondents, two of which included very little LGBTQ individuals' perceptions about DV and SV (the surveys focused on their experiences). The majority of survey findings are framed through a heteronormative lens and discuss gender in binary terms.

When studies seek randomized survey samples, it is not always possible to ensure that respondents are representative of the overall population. However, greater attention must be placed on identifying and implementing supplementary approaches of engaging marginalized groups in research, as exclusion of their voices contributes to the development and implementation of DV and SV responses that may be inappropriate or harmful to them.

### **5.4 There is a lack of understanding about child and youth perspectives**

Two surveys included youth under 17 years old; however, youth were under-represented in the first survey and data from the second survey was not disaggregated to understand specifically the perceptions of youth from other adult categories. For example, one study included in this review found that youth participants "consistently identified the broader public perception of LGBTQ2+ identities, and LGBTQ2+ youth in particular, as a negative component of [gender-based violence]. Participants identified negative media portrayal as a key issue, particularly the prevalence of news coverage focused on violence directed at LGBTQ2+ communities, and coverage debating the validity of LGBTQ2+ identities."<sup>118</sup> Additional research can focus on understanding public perceptions about LGBTQ2+ youth and how they are portrayed in media.

Overall, greater attention should be placed on understanding the perspectives of children and youth in DV and SV literature to understand the challenges, impact, and solutions to support a subgroup of Albertans that may face additional barriers due to their age.

### **5.5 There is a greater need to understand the complexity of situations and issues**

Although surveys, scales, and polls are not designed to solicit detailed information from respondents, this review shows that additional research is required to understand the complexity of respondents' perceptions and experiences. Disaggregating the data is an important first step (discussed above), and qualitative research (e.g., interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions) will provide additional context to answer questions such as, "Why do these individuals have these

perceptions? What would help to shift their perceptions? What has/has not been effective at shifting their perceptions?”

Domestic violence and sexual violence are complex issues, and surveys and polls, alone, do not capture these nuances. One survey in this review explicitly examined the perceptions of men about violence against women, which enabled deeper analysis of the perceptions and behaviours of men and the creation of recommendations to strengthen men’s perceptions and behaviours in relation to violence against women. Building on the strengths of this particular survey, additional research and diverse methods can explore Albertans’ perceptions on important issues such as men’s experiences of violence and child abuse.

## 6.0 Recommendations for advancing change in Alberta

1. **We need to close the gap between Albertans’ supportive attitudes toward gender equality and their everyday behaviours and practices.** This review shows that, overall, Albertans have supportive attitudes about the concept of gender equality, which is important because gender equality is a cornerstone to stopping violence against woman. However, this review illustrates that Albertans’ supportive attitudes are not showing up in everyday practices and behaviours in workplaces, communities, and homes. For example, one of the studies included in this review demonstrates that while most Albertan men believe that violence against women is a serious issue and 90 percent state that they would likely intervene if they knew a victim of domestic violence, relatively fewer (68 percent) state they have taken action in a public context.<sup>119</sup> As another example, most Albertans believe that workplace violence is a serious issue, and both the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta have made significant changes to their legislation and policies such that workplaces are required to engage in policy changes to prevent and address workplace violence. However, this review shows that there is a gap between the establishment of these workplace policies and employees’ perceptions about their implementation and effectiveness: employees largely did not notice changes to the workplace as a result of the policies – and even those who did notice a difference could not identify the changes.

These examples show that traditional behaviour-change theories and approaches, such as policies and programs/training, may not be enough to achieve gender equality.<sup>120</sup> This is because, in part, humans have as many as 150 cognitive biases that often over-ride our own attitudes and beliefs.<sup>121</sup> Further, social norms are often a stronger influence on behaviour than personal attitudes and beliefs, which means that humans often behave in ways that do not align – and can even contradict – their attitudes and beliefs. To close this attitude-behaviour gap, we need to draw on different behaviour change theories and approaches, including social norms theory, social network theory, and behavioural economics.

These theories show that, for example, behaviours are socially “contagious” up to three degrees of influence. This means that our friends’ friends’ friends’ affect everything that we feel, think, and do.<sup>122</sup> Partnering with and leveraging the influence of leaders within social

circles, therefore, can be an effective approach for promoting a “contagion” of behaviours and practices that support and reinforce gender equality. As another example, these theories show that changes to our physical environments can have an immediate impact on our behaviours. This means that an emphasis on creating equitable and inclusive physical environments, in addition to policies and training, can help to close the attitude-behaviour gap among Albertans. *By putting greater emphasis on understanding and changing the contexts in which people live, work, and interact (as opposed to focusing exclusively on changing individual attitudes and beliefs) IMPACT can build Albertans’ supportive attitudes towards gender equality and cultivate workplaces, communities, and homes where everyday practices and behaviours reinforce these beliefs.*

- 2. We need to conduct research to understand the perceptions of marginalized groups and we need to analyze this data through an intersectional lens.** This review shows that there is a limited body of research that examines diverse perspectives in Alberta. For example, approximately 75 percent of the participants in the study on men’s perceptions of DV and SV<sup>123</sup> identified as European/White and about 40 percent of survey respondents had lived in Alberta for 40 years or longer. As another example, only 7 percent of respondents in one of the surveys on perceptions of elder abuse and violence<sup>124</sup> indicated Indigenous status and other ethnic backgrounds were either not collected or not published to describe the profile of respondents. As a last example, the study on workplace violence<sup>125</sup> shows that half of the survey respondents were women and the other half were men, but it does not appear that there was an option for respondents to identify as other genders. In sum, this review shows that, overall, research on Albertans’ perceptions of DV and SV focuses on the perceptions of dominant social groups (i.e., employed, high socio-economic status, born and raised in Canada, White, able-bodied, etc.) while the perspectives of racialized groups, Indigenous people, people that identify as LGBTQS2+, people with disabilities, children and youth, and people living in poverty are largely omitted.

To address this issue, the IMPACT group emphasized the need to, firstly, conduct additional research to understand marginalized groups’ perceptions of DV and SV. Secondly, this research data needs to be analyzed through an intersectional lens to examine the simultaneous and interacting effects of gender, race, class, and sexuality on people’s perceptions and experiences.<sup>126</sup> Below is a brief list of approaches that may help to advance this work, some of which were identified by IMPACT.

- In addition to reviewing academic literature, review studies and reports conducted by community organizations and groups that engage with marginalized groups. These studies can bring a nuanced understanding of the perspectives of marginalized groups, support understanding of what factors contribute to these perspectives, and inform the design and implementation of campaigns and resources that may help to amplify or shift perspectives about DV and SV among marginalized groups.
- Expand research methods. The studies included in this review predominantly collected data through phone calls and online surveys. While these methods help to ensure an adequate sample size, additional methods such as focus groups, interviews, photo-voice, and data collected through social media and other public

platforms should be explored as they may be more effective at reaching and engaging marginalized groups.

- Disaggregate data. This review shows that data disaggregation is not common practice in the research on public perceptions of DV and SV. Data disaggregation is necessary research method to more effectively understand the experiences and perspectives of individual and groups with intersectional identities.
- Use different avenues to understand children and youth's perceptions. Children and youth are largely omitted from research on perceptions of DV and SV and there is potential to close this gap by drawing on public data available through social media (i.e., TikTok and Instagram) and other public platforms (i.e., Reddit). Further, IMPACT members that represent youth advocacy groups/organizations and education systems may build the capacity of the DV and SV sector by providing examples of how children and youth have been successfully included in research.

**3. We need to use research findings to target and segment our campaigns.** This review shows that there are a number of gaps in Albertans' perceptions about DV and SV and we need to use these findings to design and implement tailored campaigns to close these gaps. Below are potential approaches for addressing the gaps identified in this review:

- Support the general population to understand the seriousness and prevalence of SV and spousal abuse among seniors.
- Support young adults 18 to 35 years old to develop skills and commitment to have healthy relationships with elders, contributing to the prevention of elder abuse from happening in the first place.
- Design and implement training and campaigns that help Albertans to understand DV and SV both as overlapping issues *and* as unique issues.
- Disaggregate research data to inform the design and implementation of campaigns that appropriately support individuals and groups from marginalized backgrounds.
- Support men in Alberta in the following areas: addressing rape myth and changing victim-blaming attitudes, understanding coercive control, understanding their socialization into sexist and problematic messaging, and learning skills to take action against sexism and violence against women in public spaces.

Lastly, attitudes and behaviours that reinforce gender equality must be held by people of all genders and across all age categories. Different strategies and campaigns may help to educate and advance knowledge and helpful behaviours in different demographic groups, including women, children, and youth. IMPACT can play a role in advancing these focus areas.

**4. We need to increase education about coercive control among Albertans and across all social sectors.** This review shows that the overall population is generally aware that DV/SV involves non-physical forms of violence (i.e., neglect, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, verbal abuse). The DV/SV sector should build on this emerging understanding and support Albertans in understanding the definition and impacts of coercive and controlling behaviours

in intimate and family relationships. A deeper understanding of coercive control (including sexual coercion) may support both members of the public and social professionals in moving towards a more expansive and descriptive understanding of DV and SV, contributing to the design and implementation of different responses to DV and SV.

For example, the model that currently guides the DV and SV sector focuses on isolated incidents of physical assault. On the other hand, the coercive control model emphasizes that DV and SV are often subtle and difficult to see, involve frequent but generally low-level assault, and that DV and SV are often ongoing and that resulting harms are accumulative.<sup>127</sup> As a result, responses to DV and SV within the current model focus on safety planning and harm reduction, while responses within the coercive control model focus on reallocating power, human rights, and addressing harms to personhood.

If laws, policies, services, attitudes, and behaviours become more in line with the theories, principles, and values of the coercive control model, then the DV and SV sector and the general public may become more effective at addressing the “invisible” but pervasive aspects of DV and SV. IMPACT can play a leadership role in advancing these efforts by ensuring that the primary prevention framework for Alberta includes an explicit focus on educating the public about coercive control, as well as building the capacity of social professionals to use the coercive control model to change laws, policies, programs, and organizational practices.

To learn more about the coercive control model, visit <https://preventdomesticviolence.ca> and review, “Building a case for using ‘Coercive Control’ in Alberta: Discussion paper.”

**Appendix A: Detailed outline of reports and studies included in the analysis**

#	Title of the Instrument/Study	Year	Author/Publisher	Focus	Sample size	Diversity in sample	Method	Location	Gender	Age group	Stratified by Age	Brief description
1	Albertans' Perceptions of Bullying, Family Violence and Elder Abuse	2018	Advanis on behalf of the Government of Alberta	Family violence; elder abuse	1,603	Did not indicate	Computer-aided telephone interviewing and web survey	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	Young adults (18-34); Adults (35-54); Older adults (55-64); Seniors 65+	The goal of this study was to understand public perceptions of family violence and bullying in Alberta.
2	Awareness and Perceptions of Elder Abuse with Specific Attention to Financial Abuse	2009	Ekos Research for Justice Canada	Family violence; elder abuse (including sexual abuse)	3,002	Educational attainment; visible minority	Telephone survey	Canada (with Alberta sample)	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	Young adults (18-34); Adults (35-54); Older adults (55-64); Seniors 65+	The goal of this study was to understand the Canadian public's awareness and perceptions of elder abuse, with specific attention to financial abuse.
3	Men's Attitudes and Behaviours Toward Violence Against Women	2019	Leger on behalf of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	DV (including SV)	1,454	Educational attainment; born in Canada; tenure in Canada and Alberta; ethnicity	Telephone survey	Alberta	Male	Adults (18+)	Young adults (18-34); Adults (35-54); Older adults (55-64); Seniors 65+	The goal was to understand perceptions of domestic violence, perceptions and attitudes towards violence against women and perceptions of the role men play in reducing and preventing violence.
4	The Alberta Men's Survey: A Conversation with Men about Well-being and Healthy Relationships	2016	Alberta Men's Network	Men's wellbeing and healthy relationships without violence	2,214	Nationality; gender and sexual identity; living with disabilities; mental health challenges; financial circumstances	Online survey and in-person survey	Alberta	Male	Adults (18+)	Did not stratify	The goal was to understand men's sense of well-being and capacities to build and sustain healthy relationships, in particular to understand what it means to be a man, what masculinity pressures are, and men's help-seeking strategies.
5	Addressing Family Violence in Airdrie: Environmental Scan	2017	Synergy Research Group; The City of Airdrie	DV; family violence	555	Did not indicate	Focus group with service-providers and community online survey	Airdrie, AB	Male & Female	Youth (under 18) and Adults (18+)	Youth (18 years or younger); Adults (25 to 54); Older adults (55+)	The City of Airdrie commissioned this study in the Spring of 2016 to learn about prevalence, perceptions and influencing factors regarding the social issue of domestic violence within its community.

#	Title of the Instrument/Study	Year	Author/Publisher	Focus	Sample size	Diversity in sample	Method	Location	Gender	Age group	Stratified by Age	Brief description
6	LGBTQ2+ Youth Priorities for Addressing Gender-Based Violence	2018	Wisdom2Action for the Public Health Agency of Canada	LGBTQ2+ youth experiences with gender-based violence	500	Sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, urban/rural, living with disabilities, income level	Online survey, Twitter chat,	Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto	LGBTQ 2+ Male & Female	Youth (12-29)	Did not stratify	Wisdom2Action organized 4 youth consultations across Canada that provided an opportunity for young people to engage in deeper discussions related to LGBTQ2+ youth and gender-based violence, through the creative facilitation approach employed by W2A youth facilitators. Findings include results about perceptions of LGBTQ2+ identities.
7	Violence and the Workplace survey	2019	Leger on behalf of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	SV and DV	1,208	Employment status, company size, industry	Online interviews	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	Young adults (18-34); Adults (35-54); Older adults (55-64); Seniors 65+	Leger was contracted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to measure several aspects concerning Violence and the Workplace. The research refers to the 2009 baseline survey of employed Albertans that was done to understand Albertans' experience and perspectives on workplace violence and on family violence impacting the workplace.
8	Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Childhood Sexual Abuse in Alberta	2020	Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services	SV	1,512	Indigenous, sexual orientation, visible minority, disability	Telephone survey	Alberta	Male & Female	Adults (18+)	Did not stratify	In partnership with the Government of Alberta, AASAS undertook research to provide insight into the prevalence and nature of Albertans' experiences of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault throughout their lifetime. Study includes questions on perceptions and awareness of sexual assault and abuse.

## Appendix B: Methodology

Public perceptions about an issue are typically measured through focus groups; scales, polls, and/or surveys; content analysis of mass media coverage; and analysis of behavioural and/or outcome data.<sup>128</sup> This study examines public perceptions of DV and SV in Alberta as measured through scales, polls, and/or surveys used within the last fifteen years. Although there are many terms that are often used interchangeably to describe these instruments (e.g., tests, inventories, questionnaires), the terms ‘scale’, ‘survey’ and ‘poll’ are used in this study as defined below.

“A **scale** is often used as a way to measure abstract concepts/constructs. A construct is a representation of something that does not exist as an observable dimension of behavior. Scales commonly include psychometric properties and correlates, and require statistical analysis and various other assessments to be considered valid (e.g., dimensionality assessment, reliability assessment, validity assessment).”<sup>129</sup>

“A **survey** is a much broader instrument that can include one or more different scales and/or constructs with the purpose of gathering information from a sample of individuals. In comparison with scales that have pre-determined set of items to ensure validity and reliability, surveys are flexible and can be customized for various needs. For example, a government department may commission a survey to gather public perception of a perceived legislative change. The questions asked in the survey may not have been validated (i.e., undergone reliability or validity assessment) and may not stay the same over time as legislation changes. As a result, survey methods are often utilized by governments, community organizations and community-based researchers to measure the behaviours, attitudes and other preferences of a sample from the population of interest in order to reliably project the findings onto the larger population.”<sup>130</sup>

“**Polls** are conducted by soliciting opinions from a sample and then extrapolating those results to make predictions about the opinions of an entire population”<sup>131</sup> Although polls usually consist of only one simple question and cannot always be generalized to a larger population,<sup>132</sup> this term was included in the search strategy to broaden the search.

### Literature Search:

The literature search involved screening scales and surveys from a scoping review conducted in 2018<sup>133</sup> on the perceptions of gender norms. Authors reviewed over 100 instruments and studies relevant to this study. An additional academic and grey literature search was conducted with the following key words: Alberta AND ‘gender-based violence’ OR ‘domestic violence’ OR ‘family violence’ OR ‘bullying’ OR ‘sexual violence’ OR ‘intimate partner violence’ OR ‘violence against women’ OR violence OR abuse AND scale OR survey OR poll AND perception\* or norm\* or attitude\* or stereotype\* or opinion\*.

An academic search was conducted using all databases as part of the EBSCO platform, including, but not limited to: Academic Search Complete, Soci Index with full text, Social Work Abstracts. The grey literature search was conducted using Google search and reviewing the websites of relevant key

institutions (e.g., Government of Alberta, Ekos Research). To narrow down relevant information, only the first five pages of each Google search were reviewed. Literature was limited to the English language published between 2005 to 2020.

### **Screening of Literature:**

The initial screening of the literature was based on the following inclusion criteria:

- At least one question in the report/study focuses on public perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence, sexual violence, family violence, intimate partner violence, violence against women, or gender-based violence in Alberta;
- Any population group, gender, and geographic location in Alberta;
- Any Alberta sample; and
- Includes an Alberta dataset collected in or after 2005.

A list of identified reports and studies that met the initial screening criteria were sent to a group of IMPACT members, and their input was gathered to ensure that the list of instruments was complete. After integrating IMPACT members' feedback, an advanced screening of the literature was conducted.

The advanced screening of the literature was based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Instruments that have at least one question that focuses on public perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence, sexual violence, family violence, intimate partner violence;
- Violence against women and gender-based violence in Alberta;
- Studies that have Alberta dataset *AND* findings include results specific to Alberta; and
- If survey was conducted several times, the most recent version was used for analysis.

The advanced screening of the literature was based on the following exclusion criteria:

- Studies that do not include Alberta dataset or only provide aggregated results that do not distinguish results for Alberta;
- Instruments that solely focus on prevalence, experiences or behaviours of individuals;<sup>134,135</sup>
- Instruments that solely focus on perceptions of general violence, crime, victimization or safety;
- Instruments that solely focus on victimization and/or victims' perceptions of victimization;
- Instruments that solely focus on perceptions of specific interventions, programs and/or processes related to DV/SV; and
- Studies that solely focus on individuals who have participated in programs or initiatives relevant to DV/SV.<sup>136,137</sup>

### **Search results:**

- The academic search resulted in 212 results, none of which met the criteria of the initial screening.
- Based on the screening of the instruments identified in the 2018 scoping review and the additional literature search (both academic and grey), 19 reports were identified for further screening against inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- No additional instruments were identified by a group of IMPACT members.

- Advanced screening resulted in the 8 instruments being included in the analysis (Table 1).
- No scales or polls met the inclusion criteria and all included instruments that met the criteria were surveys.

**Analysis of literature:**

The surveys included in this study were analyzed to understand the perceptions of family violence and sexual violence in Alberta, as well as more nuanced findings on the perceptions of violence at different ages. In addition, special focus was given to the men’s perceptions of domestic violence/sexual violence, perceptions of violence in the workplace, and perceptions of elder abuse in Alberta. Finally, one municipal survey was reviewed in detail to determine the extent to which public perceptions at the municipal level align with perceptions at the provincial and national levels.

A draft that summarized key findings from the review was shared with IMPACT members in June 2020. They had an opportunity to provide feedback to inform the development of the moving forward section of this review.

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