

Policy Briefing Note

The effects of terminology (IPV, DV, FV) on individuals fleeing violence

Inconsistencies in Violence Against Women (VAW) sector terminology affect the eligibility of individuals fleeing violence to access certain services. This can lead to homelessness or their return to an abusive partner or household. VAW shelter policies that lack a trauma-informed lens, re-traumatize women, gender diverse and children fleeing violence.

Background

- Language used within the sector determines an individual's eligibility to access shelter services: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Domestic Violence (DV), Family Violence (FV) or a combination. (see Annex A for provincial/territorial coding)
- There is no standardized model or governance structure for policies and language used by VAW shelters.
- Policies are currently set by shelter associations (e.g. Alberta Council for Women's Shelters) or by provincial funders (e.g. Department of Families, Government of Manitoba).
- Many jurisdictions specifically serve women fleeing IPV, creating gaps in services for women and gender diverse people experiencing non-partner violence.
- Other groups that experience non-partner violence: survivors of sex trafficking, women who engage in sex work, and women who experienced violence while homeless.
- In 2018, only 13% of all shelter beds across Canada were women-specific. Many women do not go to co-ed facilities due to possible violence that can be experienced in those spaces or previous trauma.
- 70% of northern reserves do not have women-specific shelters even though northern communities face higher rates of GBV.

Considerations

Family Violence: any form of abuse or neglect experienced by a child or adult from a family member or a current/former intimate partner.

Pros:

Includes violence perpetrated by family members other than an intimate partner. Includes violence perpetrated against children

Cons:

Does not cover violence due to gender identity or expression. Due to FV, some shelters prioritize women experiencing active physical abuse for services

Domestic Violence/IPV:

violence within a marriage, common-law or dating relationship at any time or after it has ended whether partners live together or not

Pros:

Includes post-separation violence and violence experienced in an intimate relationship where partners do not live together

Cons:

Does not cover violence due to gender identity or expression. Some types of IPV for individuals with disabilities cannot be prosecuted in the Criminal Code of Canada

Gender-Based Violence:

Violence faced by individuals because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender, regardless of intimate partner status

Pros:

Encompass nuances of violence such as humiliation, degradation and control. Encompasses both PV and IPV but includes violence experiences by sex workers and those who are trafficked

Cons:

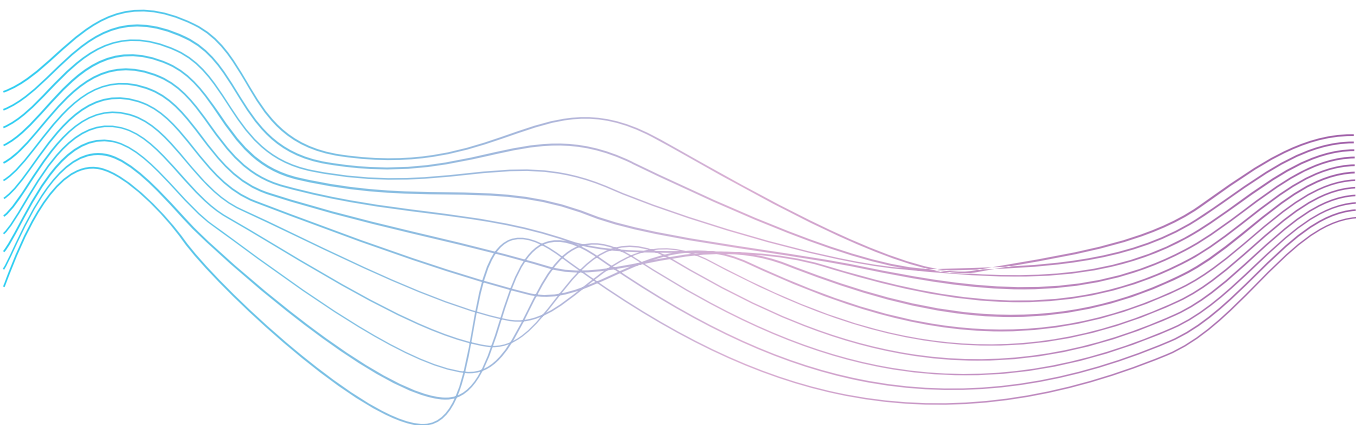
Requires extensive education campaigns and resource allocation to review and revise existing systems and definitions

Conclusion:

Gender diverse people fleeing violence navigate systems with specific eligibility criteria that they are not aware of until they're turned away at the door. The lack of standardized, inclusive terminology within the sector can drastically affect the services they can access. The language used across jurisdictions is interpreted and applied differently and does not incorporate forms of violence outside familial or intimate relationships.

Recommendations:

- Conduct or commission a rights-based, GBA+ audit of current definitions of IPV/FV/DV used in policy, programming, legislation, and funding allocation.
- Streamline definitions of VAW into Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and include IPV, FV and other experiences of sexual and physical violence due to homelessness, exploitation, and poverty.
- Create shelter policy guidelines that meet the diverse needs of women and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness or housing precarity.
- Make long-term investments in shelter organizations serving women and gender diverse people fleeing violence.



Annex A: Prevalent Terminology in Each Province/Territory

Province/ Territory	Family Violence (FV)	Domestic Violence (DV)	Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
AB	✕	✕	
BC		✕	
MB	✕	✕	
NB		✕	✕
NL	✕	✕	
NS		✕	
NT	✕		
NU	✕		
ON	✕	✕	
PE	✕	✕	✕
QC		✕	
SK	✕	✕	✕
YT		✕	