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BEHIND THE NUMBERS / *The findings of abuse were so upsetting that some interviewers burned out*

Violence survey takes toll on staff

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Social Trends Reporter

CANADA'S first national survey on violence against women was so harrowing to conduct that the 30 female interviewers had weekly sessions with a psychologist during the five months it went on.

They were also screened by the psychologist before they got the jobs, said Holly Johnson, Statistics Canada project manager for the survey. They had to be able to handle high levels of stress and display excellent coping skills, she said.

Nevertheless, because of the large amount of violence reported, some of the interviewers burned out and many more left for other jobs.

In the survey, 12,300 randomly chosen Canadian women were telephoned and asked whether they had experienced physical or sexual violence as adults. The interviews, ranging from 15 minutes to three hours, took place between February and June after more than a year of testing and consultations with women's rights advocates.

The survey is the first of its type in the world and Canada's most comprehensive on the subject.

However, it has been harshly criticized by women's groups. Many felt that adequate statistics were already available and that the \$1.9-million it cost to carry out

the survey should have been spent on helping victims of violence.

"The bottom line is, the money's been spent, now will women be believed?" Susan Bazilli, a lawyer with the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children in Toronto, said yesterday.

Activists have also spoken out against a \$10-million federal government panel whose report on stories of violence against women was released in July.

Women's groups feared the Statscan survey would produce evidence that a low number of women are assaulted. They were also concerned that the interviews themselves would put women at risk, especially if they were in the company of an abuser when the phone rang.

"It's an extremely traumatic experience. Do they say: Thanks for your time, and hang up?" Ms. Bazilli said.

Almost one-quarter of the women surveyed who reported assaults to the interviewer had never told anyone about them.

But Karen Rogers, a senior analyst who worked on the survey, said extensive advance testing indicated that women did not appear to flock to community-service organizations in distress after their interviews.

Some groups were also critical of the survey because it did not capture data from women who do not speak French or English. It also failed to reach

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE

The survey defined violence as an experience of physical or sexual assault that is consistent with legal definitions of these offences and could be acted on by a police officer

Sexual Assault

The survey asked two questions about sexual assault by men other than husbands or common-law husbands:

1. "Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other man known to you) ever forced you or attempted to force you into any sexual activity by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way?"
2. "Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other man known to you) ever touched you against your will in any sexual way, such as unwanted touching, grabbing, kissing or fondling?"

Wife Assault

Women were asked a series of questions about whether their husband or common-law husband had done certain violent things. Violent actions counted included these:

- threatened to hit you with his fist or anything else that could hurt you;
- thrown anything at you that could hurt you;
- pushed, grabbed or shoved you;
- slapped you;
- kicked, bit or hit you with his fist;
- hit you with something that could

hurt you;

- beat you up;
- choked you;
- threatened to use or used a gun or knife on you;
- forced you into any sexual activity when you did not want to by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way.

Physical Assault

The survey asked two questions about physical assault by men other than husbands or common-law husbands.

1. "Now, I'm going to ask you some questions about physical attacks you may have had since the age of 16. By this I mean any use of force such as being hit, slapped, kicked or grabbed, to being beaten, knifed or shot. Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other man known to you) ever physically attacked you?"
2. "The next few questions are about face-to-face threats you may have experienced. By threats I mean any time you have been threatened with physical harm, since you were 16. Has a (male stranger, date or boyfriend, other man known to you) ever threatened to harm you? Did you believe he would do it?"

women in Canada's North; those who do not own a telephone; or those in shelters for battered women.

However, it is still considered statistically representative of Canadian women.

Statscan will publish more data from the survey in March.

REFERENCE: Statistics Canada: The violence against women survey. *The Daily*, November 18 (1993). Catalogue 11-001E, ISSN 0827-0465. [Arts Library call number: CA1 SC 11-001E]

The article EM9358 reprinted above is used in Chapter 4 of the STAT 231 Course Materials and in Figure 2.2b of the STAT 332 Course Materials.