

# **Women's Safety: Is there Progress in Putting Gender into Crime Prevention?**

**A partial progress report on the integration of gender in national and local crime prevention policies and practice.<sup>1</sup>**

**Margaret Shaw**

*Director of Analysis and Exchange  
International Centre for the Prevention of Crime, Montréal, Québec, Canada*

## **Summary**

Most national crime prevention policies make no distinction between the needs or impact of crime on men and women. Because most northern countries still interpret "gender" to mean "women", national strategies and programmes on women's safety tend to be reactionary and focussed on victimization, especially domestic or family violence. In crime prevention, work has mainly been limited to city-based initiatives for preventing stranger violence in public spaces. *Safety audit* tools have led to recommendations for increased situational crime prevention and support to services for women.

Short- and long-term strategies are now being developed which involve a more comprehensive range of prevention, education, and support programmes. This includes working with children, families, schools, and the media - for example, programmes for both girls and boys on gender roles and attitudes toward violence and aggression.

More gender-disaggregated data and monitoring/evaluation is needed to identify effective practices/tools that help convince governments of the value for all citizens of promoting women's safety. Partnerships must be developed in order to improve sustainability of comprehensive initiatives. A continuing fear of working with men must be overcome so that men's roles and responsibilities in ending gender-based violence can be addressed. The North can learn a lot from the South's initiatives to change men and boys' attitudes and behaviour toward women and girls as well as mobilizing young men to prevent violence against women.

## **Introduction**

It is a great privilege to be able to take part in the 1st International Seminar on Women's Safety. I am here on behalf of the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC). We are a small NGO located in Montréal, founded in 1994, and supported by a range of countries, international organizations and NGO's concerned with the prevention of crime. Our role is to assist governments, local leaders, professional organizations and communities to develop effective crime prevention. We do this by gathering and disseminating knowledge, facilitating the

exchange of information and expertise, and providing technical assistance, and we support a model of community safety which focuses on locally-based partnership planning and action.

In the very short time allotted for this presentation I have been asked to report on what is happening internationally in relation to women's safety and crime prevention. This forms part of an ongoing programme of work at ICPC on women's safety and the gendering of crime prevention.<sup>2</sup>

I am well aware that many of you have a great deal of more practical experience and knowledge of working on the ground - in a range of very different cultures and contexts – than we have, and that much of what we have been able to do is informed and shaped by our own background in the North, as well as what is readily available to us. We hope, during the course of this Seminar, to learn a great deal from you about experience and practice internationally.

I would like to touch on three questions:

- 1) What have we found so far – since this is very much work in progress?
- 2) What does that tell us in terms of what is needed to implement successful, effective programmes?
- 3) What seems to be some of the problems and challenges (there are always new ones!)?

## **What is happening – problems of understanding and definition**

One of the biggest challenges with any international comparisons is working across cultural and linguistic barriers. Different countries – even in the same region – see and approach problems very differently.

Women's safety and violence against women are very complex issues involving a range of political, economic, social, cultural, and health factors. They have been forced onto government agendas over the past 25 years, but in most countries there has been no traditional

government ministerial responsibility for women's issues, and thus no common response. Since 1995, the UN Beijing Conference has required governments to respond to gender issues, and the impact of Beijing has been acknowledged by a number of countries and women's organizations.

Nevertheless, what you find when you search for information depends very much on what questions you ask.

- 1) When you ask about national policies or strategies on women's safety there is a variety of responses and understandings. In most countries this is interpreted to mean violence against women, domestic violence or family violence. In a small number of countries you may be referred to city-based projects or the work of NGO's. In others you will be directed to public health departments.
- 2) When you ask about national crime prevention policies or projects (and there are now many countries with national policies and programmes) and how they relate to women – most will be gender-neutral, making no distinction between the needs or impact of crime on men and women. There will, however, often be a small range of programmes and funding directed to women, but again primarily concerned with the prevention of domestic violence, family violence and less often public safety, stranger violence/sexual assault.
- 3) When you ask about gender-based violence (the term officially used, for example, by UNIFEM and other international organizations post Beijing) you will be directed to policies on gender equality and gender mainstreaming – which includes a whole range of issues from health, training, work, employment conditions, decision-making roles, as well as violence against women and girls.

So there is a large array of terms and definitions currently in use, and considerable confusion:

- violence against women
- domestic violence
- family violence
- sexual violence
- women's safety
- gender-based violence
- gender safety
- gender-based crime

These terms are just those used in English – many of them do not translate well, nor are they defined in the same ways in different countries. It is not possible to expand on these definitions and confusions here, but it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of the focus of this Seminar which has been a field of work spanning a number of years. *Women's safety* refers to a range of strategies and policies which work to create safer environments for women and girls, often focusing on women's insecurity and risk of violence in *public* spaces. Much of the work has centred on the prevention of street and stranger violence in public space, using tools such as *safety audits* and exploratory or safety walks, and leading to recommendations for situational crime prevention initiatives, as well as increasing local authority support to front-line services for women. There has been an emphasis on prevention pursued through direct partnerships between local grassroots organizations, communities and municipal governments, thereby increasing the role of women in local decision-making. At the international level women's safety is now closely associated with the promotion of urban governance and democratic decision-making.

## **Former national strategies**

So far our review has looked at a range of countries in Europe, North America, South America, Africa, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Primarily, this has included material in English and French. We have also consulted international and regional organizations, forums and NGO's.

What we have found is that where countries have had national strategies, or at least programmes on women's safety, these were primarily directed to victimization issues and reacting after events. Thus, most policies or programmes have clustered around violent domestic events themselves, including the criminal justice system, victim support, police protocols, training judges, shelter provision, education and public awareness. When women's public safety has been recognized within policy initiatives, it has often been in terms of crime prevention advice to women to avoid danger and dangerous places, etc. Work on *women's safety* tended to be restricted to a few city-based initiatives, such as those in the Canadian cities of Montréal, Toronto and Ottawa, rather forming part of than national strategies.

## New national strategies

Since the 1995 Beijing Conference and Beijing +5 in 2000, there has been a much more explicit recognition of the problems of women's safety – but in most northern countries this has again been interpreted in terms of domestic violence. In Africa, in countries such as Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa there has been considerable focus on the safety of women and girls not only in domestic settings but also in public spaces. The rape and sexual assault of women and girls has been recognized as a major issue requiring national and local government action.

There is now much more data collection, new legislation, co-ordination across government departments (e.g., linking health and education, etc.) (see ICPC 2002a). Examples include:

- 1) The Netherlands and Belgium have re-directed their national strategies on violence against women to initiate action in cities or at the local level, using city contracts or partnerships.
- 2) Scotland and Northern Ireland have both established national forums and partnerships on violence against women, which include NGO's.
- 3) England and Wales set up a Women's Unit in 1997 with two Ministers for Women, and published what amounts to the first national strategy *Living Without Fear* in 1999 – 'an integrated approach to violence against women'.
- 4) Canada and Australia both have national crime prevention strategies. Canada's was established in 1998 with women as one of its four priority areas. Australia established its *Partnership against Domestic Violence* in 1997.
- 5) South Africa developed a new action plan in 2002 to respond to violence against women, setting up an integrated interdepartmental strategy.

At the regional level there has also been a lot of activity. In the European Union, for example, the Daphne Programme has funded many partnership projects, organizations and cities. The European Women's Lobby and the European Forum for Urban Safety have both initiated

work concerned with women's safety and violence against women. Presently, there is a major international focus on the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, children and girls, given the recent UN protocol on trafficking.

At the international level, UNCHS Habitat, through its *Safer Cities* Programme, UNIFEM, HUAIROU, INSTRAW, UNICEF are all focusing more directly on issues of women's safety in cities, through empowerment, local-to-local links and capacity building, and increasing decision-making roles for women. In April 2002 in Vienna, the *UN Guidelines on Crime Prevention* were co-sponsored by 46 countries at the meetings of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. One of the basic principles outlines in the Guidelines is that gender and diversity must be taken into account in developing strategies, policies and programmes at all levels.

### **So how far has gender impacted crime prevention?**

The short conclusion seems to be that, so far, gender has not had much impact on crime prevention as it is practised nationally or locally, but that **there is movement**. Gender is still interpreted to mean 'women' for most people.<sup>3</sup> There is still specific funding set aside for women, but primarily under the headings of violence against women and domestic violence. There are the beginnings of broader prevention strategies. There are now more programmes which are concerned with women's safety and short and long-term prevention including (see ICPC 2002a):

- 1) Work with children, both girls and boys, including education programmes on gender roles, attitudes to violence and aggression, and comprehensive anti-bullying initiatives;
- 2) Work on the needs of those in rural or isolated areas, rather than exclusively on the problems of urban centres (e.g., in Australia, Canada, Nepal, South Africa, England and Wales);
- 3) An increasing number of projects and initiatives with men and boys to change attitudes and behaviour to women and girls, mobilizing young men to prevent

violence against women etc. (e.g., in Mexico, Nicaragua, ADAPT in South Africa);

- 4) Structures are being developed to increase the capacity to work in partnerships across government agencies, municipal departments, with NGO's, women's groups and representatives, at the national and local levels;
- 5) There are increasing numbers of good tools, careful inclusive analysis and projects which involve comprehensive ranges of prevention, education and support programmes;
- 6) For those with access, there has been a huge increase in the availability of information and tools on the Internet, not only national and international sites but also those often created by NGO's, e.g., Q Web based in Sweden ([www.qweb.kvinnoforum.se](http://www.qweb.kvinnoforum.se)), the European Women's Lobby ([www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)), Engender (Scotland) ([www.engender.org](http://www.engender.org)), and the site created for this Seminar [www.femmesetvilles](http://www.femmesetvilles) (Montréal, Québec).

## What are the challenges?

There is still a need for more information on good practice, effective tools, information and exchange on how gender can help improve prevention programmes. There is a need for more gender-disaggregated data, and for monitoring and evaluation of programmes and strategies to help demonstrate and persuade local and national governments of the benefits and value of both short and long-term intervention to promote women's safety.

There are other challenges (and fears) which need to be tackled – some of them familiar, some less so:

- 1) National strategies do not necessarily lead to funded sustainable initiatives and programmes.
- 2) We should not be afraid of terminology – especially the use of the term gender – of naming it, discussing it. It is important to work to clarify the confusion and differences in understanding.

- 3) The old (feminist) fears of dilution, appropriation, co-optation, co-option, transformation – of women's views and concerns and grassroots experiences – by those in power, governments, the local city hall, men.....need to be confronted.
- 4) There is still fear of government/multi-agency partnerships, and some have argued of the importance of making short-term sacrifices for long-term strategic goals (Malos, 2000).
- 5) The development of women's safety should not be restricted to, or allowed to be seen as, just situational and environmental changes. Good prevention to promote women's safety includes:
  - working on long-term strategies, early work with families, children, in schools, with adolescents;
  - working with those at greatest risk, or often excluded, including minorities, the elderly, the disabled;
  - targeting areas with the greatest problems;
  - proactively working with the media, in the workplace, the medical profession ;
  - and especially working through local partnerships to ensure greater equality of decision-making.
- 6) Finally, there is the continuing fear on the part of women's groups of (working with) men. As one commentator writing about men's roles and responsibilities on ending gender-based violence has noted (Greig, 2001):

*there is the understandable fear that by placing men at the centre of the analysis, women may once again be marginalized, not least at the material level of diverting scarce funding, that was previously available to women's programmes, to new initiatives focused on men.*

Overall, on the basis of a brief glimpse at the many projects and initiatives now concerned with women's safety world wide, it is clear that the North has a great deal to learn from the South, and that there is much work to be done, and much energy at the local level which national governments need to support and sustain.



## References

- Greig, A. (2001). *Political Connections: Men, Gender and Violence*. Working Paper Series No. 1 on Men's roles and responsibilities in ending gender based violence. New York: UN INSTRAW. [www.un-instraw.org](http://www.un-instraw.org)
- ICPC (2002a). *Developing Trust: International Approaches to Women's Safety*. Margaret Shaw & Laura Capobianco. Draft discussion paper, May. Montreal: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime.
- ICPC (2002b). *Gender and Crime Prevention*. Margaret Shaw. Montreal: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime.
- Malos, E. (2000). 'Supping with the devil?: multi-agency initiatives on domestic violence.' In Radford, J., Friedberg, M., & Herne, L. (Ed.) *Women, Violence and Strategies for Action*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Smaoun, S. (2000). *Violence Against Women In Urban Areas*. Urban Management Programme Working Paper Series 17. Nairobi: UNCHS.

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Laura Capobianco who has done much of the search and researching for this project, as well as my other colleagues at ICPC.

<sup>2</sup> The first report on this project *Developing Trust: International Approaches to Women's Safety* by Margaret Shaw & Laura Capobianco, (ICPC, 2002a) was completed in May 2002. A second discussion paper *Gender and Crime Prevention* (ICPC 2002b) will be available on the ICPC web-site [www.crime-prevention-intl.org](http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org) in 2002.

<sup>3</sup> This issue is explored more fully in the ICPC discussion paper on *Gender and Crime Prevention*.