

ON ONE DAY, 193 SHELTERING ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CANADA
RECORDED HOW MANY WOMEN AND CHILDREN THEY HELPED

SHELTER VOICES



Shelter Voices 2017 is the fourth national survey of transition houses and shelters¹ serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence. Conducted by Women's Shelters Canada (formerly the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses), this one-day snapshot² from 193 shelters across the country offers a sense of the hopes, challenges, and experiences of shelter workers and the women they serve.

On a single day, 193 transition houses and shelters were housing and helping 1432 women and 1025 children through programming, groups, and services. An additional 1712 women and 398 children were supported through outreach programs, without staying in the shelter itself.

“It's changing all the time. We have to stay on top of that to protect the women and the children from the abuser. And that can be a challenge.
– Shelter worker

“They cared. They really helped me calm down and see that I was a good person and that I didn't deserve that. – Shelter user and abuse survivor

44% of shelters were full on snapshot day

On a single day, there were 356 requests for residential services from women and 250 from children at 105 transition houses and shelters.³ Of those 606 requests, 83 women and 68 children were able to become new residents, while 273 requests from women and 182 from children were denied due to lack of capacity and resources. With 44% of responding shelters and transition houses having no available space, 75% of requests for residential services could not be accommodated. These numbers, combined with staff testimony, confirm that for a significant percentage of shelters, being chronically over capacity is a too frequent reality.

In the last year, 48% of shelters provided services to a recently arrived refugee woman

With the arrival of recent refugees from Syria and asylum seekers crossing the Canada-US border in higher numbers, shelters are increasingly doing the important work of providing services to newly arrived and traumatized women fleeing domestic violence. Challenges such as language and cultural barriers can be especially difficult for small population centres designated as refugee settlement areas.

“We’ve been struggling with finding good ways to do translations, and we’ve found that things like phone apps can be helpful.” - Shelter worker in a refugee settlement area

Perpetrators’ Misuse of Technology to Harm and Harass Women, Youth, and Children

As the use of technology grows, shelter staff are increasingly reporting concerns with the way perpetrators have misused technology. Technology enables abusers to harass, stalk, extort, bully, manipulate, emotionally and verbally abuse, and impersonate women, youth, and children through email, texting, apps, software, and social media. Hacking into social media accounts, setting up fake accounts, and distributing non-consensual images are common problems. There have even been cases of abusers discovering their ex-partner’s new contact information by impersonating her – or having someone else impersonate her – when contacting a business or service such as a telephone company or auto mechanic.

Did You Know?

It is illegal to knowingly publish, distribute, transmit, sell, make available, or advertise an intimate image without consent (Canadian Criminal Code: Section 162.1).

Women have also reported that perpetrators are tracking their movements through a wide range of location tracking options available. This can be done through downloaded apps, knowledge of passwords, and GPS devices available to make everyday driving easier. Other times, perpetrators own or have shared access to accounts, enabling him to monitor his ex-partner’s activities, phone calls, and spending.

Lack of technology can be a problem in itself. Women who cannot afford a cell phone or whose ex-partners did not allow them to have one, for example, can feel isolated and unsafe because they lack options to quickly access help if needed.

Technology misuse also affects shelters and shelter staff themselves. Gifts of toys and cell phones to children from their fathers can put the security of confidential shelter locations and their residents at risk. Perpetrators can also impersonate shelter staff by using tools that mask the phone number they appear to be calling from or creating email addresses that appear to be from the local shelter.

Percentage of Shelters with Clients Reporting Technology-Enabled Abuse

| Abusive Practice | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Intimidation and threats via technology (e.g. cell phone, texts, email) | 93.44% |
| Tracked their location via a GPS device, phone, or other location service | 66.12% |
| Impersonation (using email, online profiles, or other technologies to pretend to be them or someone they know) | 62.30% |
| Hacked into their accounts (e.g. email, social media, bank, utilities) | 62.30% |
| Distributed or posted pictures online of them without consent | 56.28% |
| Misused a cell phone to track or monitor calls, location, or other activities | 56.28% |
| Hacked into their computer to monitor their online activities or extract information | 42.62% |
| Misused Caller ID (e.g. to screen or identify calls, spoof other people's phone numbers to call or text threats and abuse) | 42.62% |
| Used/hacked/monitored Instant Messaging accounts | 42.08% |
| Tracked them down using information the perpetrator found on the Internet (including through transit passes) | 35.52% |
| Tracked or monitored the woman through devices the abuser has gifted to her children | 28.42% |
| Distributed or posted videos online of them without consent | 25.68% |
| Used a land-line phone to monitor conversations (e.g. cordless phones) | 24.04% |
| Used listening or recording devices to monitor conversations | 23.50% |
| Installed computer monitoring software or hardware on their computer (e.g. spyware, keyloggers) | 22.95% |
| Used hidden cameras or laptops, cell phones, or webcams to secretly watch or record without consent | 20.77% |
| Tampered with or destroyed assistive technology (e.g. hearing aid, screen reader, TTY machine) | 10.93% |
| Used VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology such as Skype or Google Talk to monitor or screen | 5.46% |

Safety Planning

87% of shelters currently safety plan with women, youth, and children around their own technology use and how a perpetrator might misuse technology. However, with the quick rate at which technology changes, the vast majority⁴ of shelters also voiced the need for more resources and further training related to technological safety. Many shelters are also trying to develop new policies and practices around the use of different and ever-changing technology.

Eliminating technology from their lives is not a useful or viable solution. Everyone has the right to use technology and online platforms safely.

Want to learn more? Resources on tech safety available on our website at <http://endvaw.ca/resources-technology>

“A safer life for them and their children, that’s what we’re all about.”
– Shelter worker

Technology also a Tool of Empowerment

It is important to stress that technology itself is not the problem; it is the way it is misused to elicit power and control that is problematic. Technology can also be used by women, youth, and children as tools of empowerment. They can use technology to contact shelters and transition houses, such as through sheltersafe.ca, and are using safety/panic apps to keep themselves safe. Technology makes it easy for women and their children to keep in touch with their support system while in shelter. It also helps women move towards independence such as through researching jobs, classes, housing, and goods online. It is also important to acknowledge that with the right support, technology makes collecting evidence of online abuse easier.

“There are women who go back to their spouses when their time is up because it’s a toss up between homelessness and having a roof over your head. No women should be put in the situation where they have nowhere else to turn but possible death from a spouse.” – Shelter user and abuse survivor

Shelter Voices is produced by Women’s Shelters Canada (formerly the Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses). We represent a strong, unified voice on the issue of violence against women on the national stage. Through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and adoption of innovative practices, we advance the co-ordination and implementation of high quality services for women and children accessing shelters. WSC thanks the National Union of Public and General Employees for their contribution to Shelter Voices and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for providing printing services. Thank you to the National Network to End Domestic Violence (USA) for allowing the adaptation of their survey on technology enabled abuse.

Visit our website www.endvaw.ca and find us on Facebook and Twitter at [@endvawnetwork](https://twitter.com/endvawnetwork).

¹ “Women’s shelters” and “transition houses” are regional synonyms and are used interchangeably in this report.

² Respondents picked a day between late December 2016 and late March 2017.

³ Some of these requests are likely from the same women and children contacting multiple shelters/transition houses to find one that has space.

⁴ The percentage of shelters ranged from 73%-84% depending on the type of resources and training desired.