

NON-STATUS WOMEN IN CANADA: FACT SHEET

Reasons why people don't have status in Canada

- Many people come into Canada with a temporary resident permit. If they overstay their permit they become non-status. Some people have been in Canada without status for 10, 20 or more years. Some have been here since they were small children and are completely unfamiliar with their country of origin to which they are at risk of being deported.
- Many people make a refugee claim which is rejected, but prefer to stay illegally rather than to return to an uncertain future, or even death.
- Many women come to Canada legally (sponsored by an employer, spouse or family member), but then find themselves in an abusive relationship with their sponsor. If they escape before receiving permanent resident status they might become non-status.

Statistics on the number of non-status people in Canada

- People who live without legal status are forced to live underground and work under the table in order to avoid being noticed by the authorities and consequently deported. For this reason, it is impossible to provide an accurate statistic. Estimates range anywhere from 20,000 to 200,000 individuals, but many believe that the numbers are a lot higher.

Statistics on Violence Against Women in Canada

(Please note that these statistics are only for women with legal status in Canada. There are no specific statistics on violence against non-status women, even though non-status women are at particular risk of experiencing violence for some of the reasons listed below.)**

- One half of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16
- Almost one-half (45%) of all Canadian women experienced violence by men known to them
- 1 in 4 Canadian women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital partner
- 63% of women who had been assaulted by a current or past partner or spouse were victimized on more than one occasion
- One-third of women who were assaulted by a partner feared for their lives at some point during the abusive relationship
- Women who are separated from their spouses are at particularly high risk of intimate femicide
- Twenty-five percent of women who entered shelters in 1995 had injuries that required medical attention, and 3% required hospitalization. (Bunge and Levett 1998, 19)
- Forty-two percent of women with disabilities have been or are in abusive relationships. (DisAbleD Women's Network 1989)
- Eight in ten Aboriginal women in Ontario reported having personally experienced violence. (Ontario Native Women's Association 1989, 7)

Most statistics taken from the website:
<http://www.cafv.inet2000.com/handouts/vaw/ViolenceAgainstWomeninCanada.htm>

Barriers faced by non-status women and children in Canada

- Limited access to education (i.e. ESL & public education)
- Limited/insufficient healthcare
- Limited/Inadequate housing
- Limited access to services
- Discrimination
- Prejudice
- Racism
- Sexism
- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Language barriers
- Unemployment/Underemployment
- Exploitation by employers
- Fear of being deported
- Isolation
- Fear of accessing 911 services

Why are non-status women at high risk of experiencing violence?

Women without status, face the same forms of gender based violence as all other women, but are at a higher risk because of the vulnerable position they live in:

- They have very limited access to information, counseling, and other social services, if any.
- They cannot call the police in an emergency without putting themselves at risk of deportation, as the police have authority to arrest or detain someone on behalf of Immigration.
- If her partner is charged with assault this could lead to devastating consequences for her.
- They cannot easily access medical services.

What needs to happen?

- Regularization of all non-status people in Canada
- No asking about immigration status or reporting to Immigration Canada by Police and other service providers. A 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy would make city services available to all city residents, without discrimination on the basis of immigration status.
- Changes to immigration law which protect immigrant women from abusive sponsors and employers.

Campaigns in support of non-status people

STATUS is a broad coalition of individuals and organizations advocating for the regularization of status of all non-status immigrants living in Canada. Email status@ocasi.org or call 416 322-4950 x239

The **Don't Ask Don't Tell** campaign is being organized by a coalition of groups based in the Greater Toronto Area. It was formally launched by No One Is Illegal Toronto in March 2004. Email info@dadttoronto.org

This fact sheet was created by the **Rights of Non-Status Women Network**. The Rights of Non-Status Women Network is an organized network of agencies and community members in Toronto. Our mandate is to address barriers to services and resources faced by non-status women, impacted by gender-based violence, through coordinated public education and advocacy for the purpose of systemic change.

For more information or to become involved, please contact: Andrea Gunraj, Outreach Manager at METRAC (416-392-3135; outreach@metrac.org) or Angie Rupra, Program Manager at the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (416-944-9242, ext. 1002; Hangier@womanabuse.caH).

If you are a woman in crisis or know someone who is being abused, please contact the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863-0511 or 1-866-863-7868 (TTY)