



Safety Changes Everything

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 21, 2026

As the World Cup Ends, Leaders Should Not Ignore What It Revealed About Intimate Partner Violence

Hundreds of women reached out to BWSS during FIFA, many facing high-risk abuse linked to escalating lethality.

Vancouver, BC - As governments and civic leaders celebrate the success of the FIFA World Cup, Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) is calling on decision-makers to not overlook another story that unfolded throughout the event: hundreds of women reached out for specialized support while facing some of the highest-risk forms of intimate partner violence (IPV). While the game was out on the field, we cannot forget what happened behind closed doors.

During the FIFA tournament period, BWSS responded to 734 crisis calls from women seeking specialized intimate partner violence support. This number represented a 37.2% increase in specialized service demand compared to the same time last year. These were not lower-risk or one-time crises. BWSS estimates two-thirds (65%) involved coercive control and emotional or psychological abuse, while more than half (50.3%) involved high-risk intimate partner violence requiring specialized frontline intervention.

Unlike general crisis services, specialized IPV response combines expert risk assessment, survivor-centered safety planning, systems advocacy, and long-term support for women experiencing ongoing patterns of abuse rather than isolated incidents.

The women who called described terrifying situations involving strangulation, intimidation with firearms, abuse facilitated by technology, post-separation violence, escalating threats, and other indicators widely recognized as warning signs for serious injury or femicide.

"Together, the data collected and presented by BWSS in their latest report *From Evidence to Implementation: A Practice-Based Implementation Framework for Specialized Intimate Partner Violence Response During the FIFA World Cup 2026* paints a clear picture: When specialized support was available, women reached out in increased numbers, not with isolated incidents, but with complex, high-risk situations requiring urgent intervention.

"When people talk about FIFA's legacy in Vancouver, they talk about sold-out stadiums and economic impact. But we also need to talk about the hundreds of women who reached out because this was a time of fear, intimidation, and escalating violence for them," said Angela Marie MacDougall, Executive Director of BWSS. "Every one of these contacts represents a woman who decided to reach out because they were navigating some of the most dangerous forms of intimate partner violence and need specialized expertise to help them stay alive and safe."

International research has consistently shown that reports of intimate partner violence increase during major men's football tournaments. Anticipating this increased demand, BWSS expanded its specialized crisis response to operate 24 hours a day throughout the tournament. With the exception of some support from the City of

Vancouver, BWSS was required to finance this expanded specialized response itself, demonstrating the persistent — and dangerous — gap between the public recognition of intimate partner violence and sustained public investment in the frontline expertise needed to respond to it.

"There is a crucial lesson from FIFA here," MacDougall said. "And it's that when specialized intimate partner violence services were available, women used them. If those services had not existed, many of the women may have been left to face extraordinarily dangerous situations alone."

BWSS says the findings reinforce the message behind The Downplay Effect, its province-wide public education initiative highlighting how intimate partner violence is too often minimized, delayed, treated as isolated incidents, or pushed aside as someone else's responsibility rather than recognized as a public safety issue requiring urgent, coordinated action.

"We invest heavily to keep people safe during major international events, and we should. But women's safety doesn't become less urgent when the tournament ends," said MacDougall. "The 734 contacts were from women living through serious, high-risk violence while the public conversation (and funding) focused elsewhere. The Downplay Effect asks us to stop treating these stories as footnotes and start recognizing them as deserving of the same urgency and expertise as every other commitment governments make."

The final week of the World Cup tournament also coincided with the federal government's recent announcement of \$608.4 million to advance the next phase of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. While BWSS welcomed this announcement, it says lasting progress will require coordinated investment from all three orders of government.

"This funding is certainly important, but it must translate into sustained operational funding for the specialized frontline workforce responding to women every day," said MacDougall. Without municipalities, provinces, and the federal government working together to build and maintain this capacity, women will continue to experience preventable crises."

As municipalities reflect and celebrate the success of the World Cup, and also as they prepare for local elections across the province this October, BWSS is leveraging The Downplay Effect to urge leaders and candidates to recognize specialized intimate partner violence as essential, permanent public safety infrastructure.

"The lesson from FIFA is clear," MacDougall said. "When specialized support is available, women seek it. The question now is whether governments will treat that response as essential public safety infrastructure every day of the year—not only when the world is watching."

-30-

About BWSS

Battered Women's Support Services is a Vancouver-based feminist organization providing crisis intervention, advocacy, counselling, and violence prevention education. For more than 45 years, BWSS has worked to support survivors of gender-based violence while advancing systemic change to end violence against women and girls.

To coordinate interviews or receive background materials:

Angela Marie MacDougall
604-808-0507
director@bwss.org

Background

The report, ***From Evidence to Implementation: A Practice-Based Implementation Framework for Specialized Intimate Partner Violence Response During the FIFA World Cup 2026***, examines how research on the relationship between major men's football tournaments and periods of heightened intimate partner violence risk can be translated into practical action. Building on international evidence and BWSS's frontline experience, it documents how a specialized community-based organization prepared for, responded to, and learned from the FIFA World Cup in Vancouver.

The principal focus moved the question from whether the tournament would note an increase in intimate partner violence, to the implementation of specialized services. The report examines how public awareness, expanded service capacity, specialized risk assessment, safety planning, and coordinated community response can improve access to support during foreseeable periods of increased intimate partner violence risk.

It also identifies critical implementation gaps between the recognition of intimate partner violence as a public safety issue and the operational supports required to respond effectively.

Drawing on practice-based evidence from 734 specialized service contacts during the World Cup period, the report documents the complexity of survivors' experiences and the significance of specialized responses to coercive control, escalating risk, post-separation abuse, and family law and related child safety concerns. It concludes with a practice-based framework to outline what is involved in specialized intimate partner violence preparedness and implementation during major events and other periods of foreseeable increased demand.

Report Link: [From Evidence to Implementation: A Practice-Based Implementation Framework for Specialized Intimate Partner Violence Response During the FIFA World Cup 2026](#).