

**BATTERED WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES**  
FEEDBACK AND ANALYSIS ON PAID LEAVE  
FOR DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
SURVIVORS

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Thank you for considering Battered Women's Support Services for input and feedback regarding paid leave for survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual violence. Our values and plans of action are aligned with redistribution of burden away from the women who have been abused, and paid leave is a step in that direction. We recommend expansion past the examples other provinces have set, and provide the first ten days of leave paid, at minimum, followed by up to 20 weeks unpaid, job protected leave.

We believe that the intricacies of trauma caused by domestic violence are lengthily and complex, warranting allowance for the leave to be taken at the time of exit in cases of intimate partner violence, beforehand, or later in other cases of domestic violence and sexual assault. We believe strongly that a condition of reporting to law enforcement or other police services should not be required in order to claim the leave. Given that the majority of domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) events are not reported to criminal legal system actors, and the cost to the survivor for engaging with the criminal legal system is a high tax on top of what is already a great undertaking. We believe that if proof is required, it should be contained to written documentations from a physician, lawyer, counsellor and/or community-based support worker. We understand the concern regarding “evidence” and are taking into consideration that the burden of proof is already always on those who have been abused, and think it is important for the province to relieve some of that burden, showing solidarity and belief towards survivors in a policy-based capacity. We believe this is crucial to any semblance of gender equity progress, and the province has an ethical obligation to believe survivors.

## Recommendations

- A minimum of ten days' leave is paid.
- Up to 20 weeks unpaid, job protected leave.
- Low barrier documentation requirements from a physician, lawyer, counsellor and/or community-based support worker.
  - Accepting all tasks pertinent to safety and recovery as reasonable eligibility for paid leave.
  - The confidentiality of the survivor is prioritized and protected.



## A Review of Policy and Practice:

### Literature and Reports of Domestic and Sexual Violence and the Workplace

The Public Health Agency of Canada published a report, "Family violence: How big is the problem in Canada?"<sup>1</sup>, stating that fewer than 1 in 5 (19%) instances of spousal abuse were reported to the police in 2014. We think that is a generous estimation. We asked, and our constituency told us that just as often, they would report to the police to access paid leave, as they would not access the leave if they had to report. We would like to acknowledge that many of the people who responded to our survey are in recovery from domestic violence, and the prospect of reporting could seem more plausible now than it did then.

The Chief Public Health Officer released a report with a focus on Family Violence in 2016<sup>2</sup>, offering compelling evidence that domestic violence is a major public health issue. The report claims that one in three Canadians experience abuse before the age of 15. People are reluctant to talk about familial violence due to fear for safety, feelings of shame and blame, and other stressors, which can create ongoing health issues with the people who have been victimized. One third of Canadians who have experienced family violence also experienced physical injury. 32% of the people who experienced domestic violence said they also experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress. The report also connects the stressors related to domestic violence to broader negative impacts to mental wellbeing, psychological impacts, conditions and diseases such as impaired immune systems, heart problems, gastrointestinal problems, and problematic

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. (2018, May 31). Family violence: How big is the problem in Canada? Government of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/problem-canada.html>

<sup>2</sup> A Focus on Family Violence in Canada: a Report from the Chief Public Health Officer (2016) Retrieved from <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/departement-ministere/state-public-health-family-violence-2016-etat-sante-publique-violence-familiale/alt/pdf-eng.pdf>



substance use. All of these health impacts are implicated in how people are able to, or not able to work and maintain their employment status.

In a report by The Canadian Women's Foundation, "The Facts About Gender-Based Violence"<sup>3</sup>, we find an old statistic indicating that half of all women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since they turned 16. This is a statistic from 1993, as no more recent survey has inquired with Canadian women about their experience with violence. We think this contributes to the affects being overlooked. Minorities are at a higher risk: Indigenous women are overrepresented in statistics about gender-based violence, and grassroots organizations as well as the Minister of the Status of Women estimate close to 4000 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls between 1980 and 2012, which is more than double what the RCMP has on record. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, experiencing rates of violence two or three times more than able-bodied women. Newcomers are also vulnerable, as they are more likely to be economically dependent on their abuser, and less likely to report as a result of the traumas of war and oppressive governments<sup>4</sup>. Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are three to four times more likely than heterosexual women to report experiencing spousal violence<sup>5</sup>. Women of colour are taken less seriously by criminal justice systems and their perpetrators are

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<sup>3</sup> The Facts About Gender Based Violence. Canadian Women's Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/>

<sup>4</sup>Unprotected, Unrecognized: Canadian Immigration Policy and Violence Against Women, 2008-2013. Retrieved from <http://www.migrantmothersproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/MMP-Policy-Report-Final-Nov-14-2014.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Family Violence In Canada: A Statistical Profile. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303-eng.pdf>



receiving less harsh punishments<sup>6</sup>. There are many intersections to ending violence against women and girls, and we think paid leave will help some, but to varying degrees.

According to Moreau's report on residential facilities for victims of abuse in 2017/2018<sup>7</sup>, Indigenous women are wildly overrepresented in shelter occupation and reports of abuse and violence. 21% of women who leave a shelter are returning to a domicile in which their abuser lives, while 36% don't know where they are going to go. This is as much a housing crisis issue as it is an economic issue, as women who are economically secure in their own right would not face such barriers at such rates.

A report from The Canadian Labour Congress and the University of Western Ontario in 2014<sup>8</sup> recommended domestic violence paid leave, with protection that prohibits any discrimination, as well as education for employers and managers about domestic violence in the workplace. It stated that employers are losing \$77.9 million a year to the costs that businesses incur as a result of domestic violence situations and their effect on workplace productivity. It also highlighted the disruption to women's work histories domestic violence experiences cause, including lower personal incomes, job changes more often, and more casual or part time roles than women without violent experiences. We are concerned with this, because we do not want women to experience discrimination in their job prospects in the face of violence in their histories, and believe that if paid leave is to successfully support women who are experiencing

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<sup>6</sup> All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The False Promise of Victim Impact Statements. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271529974 All That Glitters Is Not Gold The False Promise of Victim Impact Statements](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271529974_All_That_Glitters_Is_Not_Gold_The_False_Promise_of_Victim_Impact_Statements)

<sup>7</sup> Moreau, G. (2019, April 17). Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse, 2017/2018. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00007-eng.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Wathen, C. N., MacGregor, J. C. D., MacQuarrie, B. J. with the Canadian Labour Congress. (2014). Can Work be Safe, When Home Isn't? Initial Findings of a Pan-Canadian Survey on Domestic Violence and the Workplace. London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved from [https://canadianlabour.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/dvwork\\_survey\\_report\\_2014\\_enr.pdf](https://canadianlabour.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/dvwork_survey_report_2014_enr.pdf)



violence and abuse, it must protect them from being discriminated against because of these events, which are of no fault of their own.

Faraday addresses the correlation between the pay gap in Canada and domestic and sexual violence incidents in her article, "Addressing Gender-based Violence Helps Close the Gender Wage Gap"<sup>9</sup>. She speaks to the impacts that domestic and sexual violence have on a woman's ability to progress through her career and further her economic standpoint. Women are set back in a myriad of ways professionally, and gender-based violence is a big factor in this. Women would have more opportunities to participate in the workforce and succeed economically if violence against women and girls were closer to elimination or had been successfully eliminated. Faraday cites the report by the Canadian Labour Congress stating that nearly a third of the people surveyed reported experiencing intimate partner violence; Indigenous women, women with disabilities and LGBTQ respondents were particularly likely to have experienced intimate partner violence; and more than 1/3 reported having at least one co-worker who was experiencing or had experienced intimate partner violence. On top of that, the report also indicated that 53% of the participants said that the violence continued at the workplace (through calls, texts, emailing, stalking, the perpetrator showing up at the workplace and/or contacting the employer or co-workers); 38% said it was affecting their ability to get to work; 82% said their work performance was negatively affected; 60% used sick leave due to violence; and 8.5% lost their jobs due to violence. 30% of the people who have experienced intimate partner violence were afraid to come to and from work because they were worried about their partner's behaviour. This led to interruptions in work histories, which makes it hard to obtain a different job later, or advance their careers.

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<sup>9</sup> Faraday, F. (2017). Addressing Gender-Based Violence Helps Close the Gender Wage Gap. Retrieved from <https://www.canadianwomen.org/gender-based-violence-gender-wage-gap/>.



Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta

In Ontario<sup>10</sup>, we see after 13 weeks of employment, employees are entitled to 10 days each calendar year, of which the first 5 are paid. This can be extended to 15 weeks unpaid, annual protected leave, consecutively or separate. The requirements for evidence are that it be "reasonable in the circumstances", and is at the discretion of the employer. We see this as perhaps a barrier to people seeking out the leave if they are concerned about their employer requiring evidence they are not willing to disclose.

Saskatchewan<sup>11</sup> reported the highest rates of domestic violence of all the 10 provinces in 2015, as well as the highest rates of physical and sexual assaults associated with family violence reported to the police, and maintains the status quo by providing 10 days leave, 5 of which are paid, after 90 days of employment. This can be extended to 17 weeks of unpaid leave in one continuous period. Written into Saskatchewan's bill on the matter are requirements of confidentiality for the survivor, with disclosure only being allowed with the explicit consent of the survivor, which seems to just be implied in other provincial statements found publicly accessible online. We think any policy that British Columbia instates needs to be explicit in its expectations of confidentiality and survivor protection.

Alberta<sup>12</sup> specifies that 90 days of consecutive employment grants entitlement to 10 days each calendar year of leave, of which the first 5 are paid. This is job protected, and there are quite a few stipulations about what is considered domestic violence based on what it is and who is committing the acts.

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<sup>10</sup> Domestic or sexual violence leave. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/domestic-or-sexual-violence-leave>

<sup>11</sup> Private Members' Bills No. 604 - An Act to provide Support ... Retrieved from [http://96bda424cfcc34d9dd1a-0a7f10f87519dba22d2dbc6233a731e5.r41.cf2.rackcdn.com/saskchamber/documents/news/SCC\\_Research\\_and\\_Advocacy\\_HR\\_Committee\\_Backgrounder\\_Private\\_Members\\_Bill\\_604.pdf](http://96bda424cfcc34d9dd1a-0a7f10f87519dba22d2dbc6233a731e5.r41.cf2.rackcdn.com/saskchamber/documents/news/SCC_Research_and_Advocacy_HR_Committee_Backgrounder_Private_Members_Bill_604.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Domestic violence leave). Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/domestic-violence-leave.aspx>



We hope that the policies developed by BC will reflect the province's commitment to believe survivors when they say they are experiencing harm. The leave can be taken to seek medical attention, use victim support services, seek counselling, relocate, or pursue legal or law enforcement assistance. We hope that BC will follow suit in accepting all tasks pertinent to safety and recovery as reasonable eligibility for paid leave.

## Our Own Due Diligence:

### Surveys, Group Discussions, and Interviews

In preparing a response to the province's request for input and feedback on the matter of paid leave for domestic or sexual violence survivors, we at Battered Women's Support Services have put together an analysis. We are including some data collected from our broad constituency of survivors and support workers pertaining to their needs and interests in the face of domestic and sexual violence befalling survivors.

We sent out two surveys, one to survivors and one to support workers, as well as ran one focus group-style conversation with women who may or may not be affected by the changes made to the Employment Standards Act based on their employment status. We also interviewed one of our own support workers who serves Indigenous women. In order to discover what survivors directly need at a time of crisis and beyond, we thought it prudent to ask women for whom access to paid leave would be tenuous at best.

We ran one group conversation with women participating in AWARE (Advancing Women's Awareness Regarding Employment), a workshop series focused on employability and economic development for women survivors of violence. This program recognizes and addresses unique barriers that women are facing and supports women who have experienced violence and abuse to move towards financial independence and self-sustainability. We chose this group because we wanted to hear their thoughts on paid supports that would not have been accessible to them, in challenging employability





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circumstances. We discussed the possibilities of subsidies being available to women on income assistance, or who are seeking to train or retrain in order to support their families independently. We discussed the injustice of the burden of leaving, and finding ways of supporting themselves and their families when they are already subjugated, while the perpetrator of violence often walks away without obligations. We also talked about housing as a great and complicated barrier to safety and freedom, particularly in Vancouver, for low-income survivors who sometimes need to leave abruptly and quickly, with children in tow, in order to be safe. We discussed the long, complex road of post-traumatic stress, and how we wished that survivors of domestic violence had the same provincial and federal protections and support systems as war veterans, because they have survived a war: it looks different because the war was fought in their homes, as opposed to elsewhere. We mused about treatments and socialized support services offered to veterans, and if they could be used as models for how women could re-enter and participate in the workforce at a pace that allows them to recover from what has happened to them. Questions the women have include: Do the provisions of paid leave have any bearing on income assistance or spousal support? And, could there be a subsidy or grant that women can apply for in conjunction with income assistance or welfare? Ultimately, while paid leave would be better than nothing, it is a small drop in the bucket of what ends up being a life-long recovery from trauma.

In a face-to-face interview with one of our support service workers who specifically serves Indigenous women, we talked about the reach of this policy, and who it was for. We discussed the fact that a lot of the women they are engaging and supporting will never have access to this leave and its paid component because they are outside the scope of its reach. "It's another pool of money that's not for the women I work with", they said, referencing the target of the policy being middle class white women, who are gainfully employed and in good financial positions to leave in the first place. "It is going to miss Indigenous women and women of colour". We discussed how Indigenous women and women of colour make up a large percentage of the women who experience domestic and sexual violence in multifaceted and repetitive ways which intersect with the traumas of colonization, slavery, traumas associated with war and oppressive



government regimes, as well as racialization and class discriminations. The bottom line of our discussion was that we could not expect women who are facing these barriers to recover and process domestic and sexual violence in their lives the same ways white women may be able to, nor will they experience the same types of oppressions and violence, and that they likely would never see the benefits of this policy as a result.

Among the results of the conversations and surveys, some patterns emerged. The survivors and workers we spoke to agreed in majority that 10 days paid leave would be welcome, and make a big difference if not change the game entirely regarding their ability to leave and find safety. They also said in majority (82%) that they would likely need three weeks or more (up to and beyond 4 weeks, two thirds of the time). They would use the time, in majority, for counselling sessions as well as moving, and the complications that can occur when having to relocate quickly. They would be more likely to access the leave if they could do so with a support worker's letter than a police report by a landslide. Their concerns lie within the barriers of bureaucracy and privacy: their worries included how easily they would be able to access the leave, as well as what they would have to disclose to their employer and workplace community in order to have access. If we consider that the Employment Standards Act is usually only covering full-time, permanent employment, about two thirds of the people who responded to our survey will not be covered under this policy at all. We think that it would be prudent for the province to consider some way of subsidizing exits for women who are unemployed, collecting socially assisted income, and/or have children they are caring for full time. We think this should have little to no bearing on their collection of spousal or child support, as the likelihood of these funds being sufficient and continuing to be collected by the survivor upon exit (if they were collected at all) is low.

When we asked support workers in our community what they thought would be best for their clients, we found that the vast majority (96%) of workers reported that their clients, in some capacity, thought about their employment status when considering leaving a domestic violence situation. We also found that the



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majority (96%) of support workers have clients who take time off due to domestic violence in their lives. Half of the workers thought their clients would be more likely to report, while the other half thought requirement to report would be a barrier. 70% of our respondents said that their clients would need up to or over 4 weeks paid leave to deal with everything they have to do to exit and recover. When we asked support workers how much impact a subsidy or grant for self-employed or unemployed women who are leaving a domestic violence situation, the majority (95%) said it would impact them a large amount or be a total game changer for them.

### Survivor and Support Worker Voices:

**We asked, They Spoke Up. Their Words Matter.**

Within our surveys, we asked Survivors and Support Workers some questions in which they could describe in their own words their experiences, concerns, and what they felt was important for the province to know. Below are some excerpts from those perspectives. Please read them all; each one is valuable and unique, as well as a window into what it is like to live with the ramifications of domestic and sexual violence in our lives, and what support workers are facing in advocacy and service of the people suffering abuse.

#### Survivor Perspectives

##### Stories from Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence

*"I was sexually assaulted by a co-worker years ago, I had to take time off. After I took the time off the board of directors decided that the man who assaulted me should be allowed to come back to work after being off on PAID LEAVE for 3 months. I decided that I couldn't work in that kind of environment I eventually quit my job. I worked as the Executive Director and positions for 16 years."*



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*"I was abused since childhood and developed borderline personality disorder, bi Polar 2, ptsd and panic attacks. Abuse was so normalized to me. I missed a lot of high school as my bfs became abusers (previously step dad) and then strangers and bosses and clients abused me. I became an alcoholic. I still worked but I didn't thrive. I was dead inside. Luckily I went into the field and started working as a support worker and had a really great network of support from my mid-twenties forward. I still miss work now and then from mental health flare ups but it's rare and I'm able to openly communicate with most of my employers."*

*"Ultimately I was unable to work due to unresolved trauma; it took 5 years before I was able to re-enter the workforce and it's been at VERY limited abilities."*

*"My health has been affected by the stress thus I have taken sick day and had to go without pay to attend court or consult legal advocates. Fellow employees including union stewards and managers have shut down my efforts to try to request help saying things like suck it up. I am a social worker in acute care and trying to gain child support with my housing at risk now for 7 years. Fighting for my and my child rights to safe affordable housing to prevent further abuse."*

*"I worked hard during a yearlong abusive relationship, but I recall waking up halfway through a shift and a manager being concerned for me. Being unable to afford to take days off, plus not having enough time and energy to take care of myself better contributed to my exhaustion and poor coping, and burnout. It was difficult to focus and not cry at work in a care facility. Some days off after crises that year may have helped me to sleep and feel stronger, and think more clearly, and seek support. I am so glad to see convenient drop in counselling in my community now. Sometimes work was helpful to get my mind off abuse, but sometimes it was extremely difficult. I know my work suffered and clients would have noticed I wasn't well some days."*



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*"In the course of two years with my abuser, he forced me to quit 3 jobs without notice. Later I tried apologizing to those companies to no avail. Since my abuser died just this year in jail for beating me yet again, I have been unable to secure employment, they want to know why my work history is so shorter those specific jobs. I also made no work friends to later use as references, I didn't want anyone to know what I was going through. Honestly I haven't found adequate help with my PTSD from my abuse. I struggle with being able to function daily. I am a health care aide which I love doing so I'm missing a huge piece of my self-worth not being able to get a job. I took a lot of overtime work which is why he ultimately made me quit. It's too fresh to be able to divulge such personal info to potential employers and I don't want to use it as an excuse."*

*"I lost my job!!! I was under so much stress. Police involvement, court, making sure my child was ok after witnessing me almost being killed trying to end the relationship. Caused me to lose a job id had for 6 years, i haven't gone back to the work force, their meanness has contributed to my low confidence. I've struggled, used food banks and we have very little new to us stuff. The PTSD I am diagnosed with now affects every aspect of my life."*

*"While I was in the relationship, my ex-partner made it very difficult for me to take on any commitments outside the home - work, or other. He does not work (independently wealthy and early-retired) but was unwilling to look after our daughter so I could go work - at least not without some heavy guilt-tripping and manipulation. I was made to feel like I was not "doing my job" as a mother or "housewife" and he strongly opposed me taking on a small 5-10 hour a week contract. As I was not supported, I could not put the hours in, and was often too emotionally drained to put in the appropriate hours to succeed and perform in this position. He made any attempts for me to secure myself as an employable person down the road very difficult. I was ashamed of my situation and felt unable to explain why I was unable to focus, was constantly emotional, fighting depression, and could not work effectively. As this is a small community, how*



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*much I perform (or don't perform) gets noticed and I feel some future professional opportunities may have been compromised because of my inability to be present with the work, or attend work events."*

*"I was a student when I experienced my sexual assault. While I continued with my students my grades dropped and there were points where I couldn't get out of bed for weeks at a time. I didn't know about any supports at school or how/if I could talk to teachers about it. I am currently working full time now and sometimes that trauma comes back and I'm lucky to have health and wellness time I can use but lots are not."*

*"I had to leave my job a few times move to different communities and start over I lost all seniority and for a while was homeless with no income"*

*"It was hard to keep a job because he had such a need for me to be home all the time. So I'd work for a bit at one job and then he'd start losing it because I was gone and eventually I'd quit."*

*"This effected my education. I consistently missed classes. As a minor at the time, I had to drop out and run away because no one believed me. Employers have not really posed a problem while on the job. I could not get a job because of my situation."*

*"I had to do all of the above, use holiday, sick, flex and overtime to recover. I was unable to work effectively because I'd go back still sore and afraid. I had to lie to my employer about my bruises. I would have to wear long sleeves long pants in the hot summer months. My whole world was turned upside down. I would take pain medicine to function through the day at work, isolate myself and not engage with others so they wouldn't ask what happened or what I have bruises. It was 5 years that seemed like a life time."*



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*"I worked in a daycare. My mom called me in sick after spending the night in the hospital in a neck brace with a severe concussion. My bosses made me come for a staff meeting and told me I couldn't leave after and had to finish the shift I should have started earlier. The kids were scared because my face was so busted up."*

*"I was encouraged to work more, and my disclosure of finding it difficult to find new housing under my circumstances, being a student and working, was brushed off and I was forced to work extra hours that made it so I was unable to attend some appointments for new housing due to the type of work I was doing. I was told by my boss to tell someone else as he was not good at listening, while I had been disclosing so that I could explain why I was not as attentive. I was also encouraged to keep working more hours after disclosing to a new supervisor, which made it impossible to seek out a counsellor. The second supervisor did suggest that I go speak with someone, but due to extra work being given and random days off that made covering bills difficult I was unable to book any appointments. I ended up taking a semester off of school to make time for a counsellor and switched jobs so that I would be able to do so. I still ended up being cut early from work a few times because I was considered unreliable for taking two Fridays a month for counselling."*

*"Occurred during childhood and though university. The resulting PTSD and associated issues have made it difficult to be employed on regular basis."*

*"I was part time self-employed at the same time as being a full time parent/homemaker. I was affected in that I became exhausted from the emotional abuse. It became worse after my ex and I separated as his abusive behaviour increased. The ongoing trauma caused health issues that made it very difficult to work while supporting my child. I still suffer from PTSD and regular migraines 4 years later."*



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*"The mental stress from the assault was one of the reasons that I eventually became unable to work. I never reported the incident to police, my family or even most of my friends. I can't concentrate."*

*"I was young when it happened: 16. I was kicked out of my house. I had a part time job at the time and I had to take on extra hours to support myself while still finishing high school. I worked constantly - either one school or at my job - to support myself, save for college, and get good grades. Due to this intense lifestyle, I really didn't start processing and healing from what happened to me until after I finished college - when I was 21. I had no emotional space to heal from what had happened when I was 16 and displaced from my home."*

*"I resigned and didn't work for some time. When I went back to work, I was only able to work on a casual basis for a while. It was hard to focus and concentrate. I definitely hid everything related to the abuse."*

*"I had to take time off unexpectedly throughout the relationship. My performance was effected at work. It would be hard to concentrate. Sometimes I couldn't get to work. When I finally left the relationship I had to move away for my safety. I had to switch from a permanent position to a contract and gave up my benefits. When that contract ended I was offered only half the work that I'd previously had."*

*"Had to take time off for emotional stress leave. When at work, would need to go cry several times a day and sometimes in front of clients. Had to work during the criminal trial and immediately afterwards. When alone, reached out to suicide and other helplines to get thru the day."*

*"I did not share with anyone. I was a full time student at the time and did not have a job. I ended up having to drop courses."*





### Would you Report for Paid Leave?

*"No it never occurred to me I could because it was emotional abuse, manipulation, financial abuse, and some physical intimidation the first time I said I wanted to separate and him to leave. Now that I have some distance from it I wish I had had counsellor support and realized how damaging it was to me and my children and left years ago — but I doubt I would ever report it to police I would fear that it wouldn't be taken seriously and I'd pay for it. "*

*"Yes. It would give support for a way out."*

*"No, that would not be a motivating factor. I was gaslighted so It took a long time to realize what was happening. When I did report the violence, the RCMP basically told me there was nothing they could do because there were no witnesses."*

*"I did report the violence to the board of directors and the police and I was still wasn't supported by either the police or organization."*

*"I'm not sure. So many cases go unfounded and for me, it was more harmful to think about a judge telling him that he was innocent than it was to not report him. I wouldn't take the paid leave if it meant I had to report it."*

*"I would and I did report the violence. But it was because I was able to be extremely vague about it that I was able to do it. All I told my employer was that I was in a "bad relationship" and that I needed time to "prepare to leave and deal with the aftermath". If I had to disclose any more, I probably would have just lied saying I was sick and using my vacation days. If I didn't have my vacation days, I would have had to lie to get unpaid leave and I was in a strong financial position at the time, so it would have been possible, but I*



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*know that's not the reality for everyone. It is hard enough to do the police reports, answering questions and detailing the awful traumatic events of the relationship to the police. It's another thing to have to tell your employer. I had worked with mine for 10 years and I trusted her so I was able to tell her what I did, but this again isn't a reality for many others."*

*"If it was a 'have to' but I don't feel people should be pressured to disclose details that are private to them. These disclosures still often are followed with so much judgement and blame placing on the victim."*

*"I did report it. But the response from the justice system traumatized me. And I don't think survivors deserve to be forced to deal with an inadequate justice system just to prove we need leave."*

*"Yes. However, in my experience reporting emotional/psychological abuse isn't effective because it is very difficult to prove. Often the other party will accuse you of the same things so it becomes a "he said, she said" situation. Also, they are very skilled at presenting one side of themselves to everyone else while continuing the abuse when nobody can see or hear."*

*"The police never believed me before. Why should I trust them now? Men get away with domestic violence and sexual assault all the time even when they get charged the sentences are a joke. I would only make the claim if knew the information was confidential and it did not expose me to further harm."*

*"I think making it mandatory to report in order to get support would be a mistake. Reporting is extremely re-traumatizing and often there are a lot of barriers to disclosing. I would not report, even if it meant I got time off. That process would have been too difficult for me."*



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*"It depends. Most of the time it's not about reporting what happened so much as healing from the violence. If the violence involves the threat of my physical safety and the physical safety of others, as well as loss of property, I might consider it."*

*"Yes. Because it would reduce the stigma and shame and embarrassment. It would make it final and the one thing holding me back was how do I financially survive this."*

### **What do you want the province to know?**

*"People need to feel heard, and that they matter to their place of employment. If people feel safe to share and given the time to heal they would become better and loyal employees."*

*"People cope at different speeds so a few days won't be enough. If the abuser is very dangerous, more time off is needed as they know where you work and the 1st months after leaving are the most dangerous."*

*"I understand there has to be proof in order to qualify, but, most woman are already terrified of leaving the abuser, add, having to report that person in order to qualify, then don't bother, the majority of woman won't do it."*

*"That most survivors are dependent on their abuser. They need the help to be able to afford to get away."*

*"You cannot put a time limit or a "number of visits" limit on healing from these types of traumas. Each person will need a different amount of time and will require different services and limiting any of these things impacts how long a person takes to heal and whether or not they can become employable again."*



## Safety Changes Everything

*"That suffering through and surviving this type of violence never leaves you. Paid leave is not a permanent fix, but it sure would have served to be a support that I could have used years ago so that I knew I wasn't completely on my own trying to figure out how to survive. I may have even been able to access support services faster and more focused if I wasn't so busy trying to figure out where and how to just provide the basics."*

*"This is so incredibly needed. Trying to move on a weekend is hard. If I had paid leave and could have moved one day while he was at work, I would have left much sooner."*

*"We need all the help we can to leave. And sometimes that is leaving while our spouse is at work and hiding in a safe place for a few days."*

*"The survivor may need more than session of paid leave in order to end the relationship permanently. If they return to the partner a few times before the final breakup, it doesn't mean they are a bad person or stupid, or are taking advantage of the system. They may just need more than one breakup, similar to how many people need to quit smoking a few times before permanently quitting. At least they are trying, and getting closer to the goal."*

*"Escaping domestic violence is not a 'once and done' milestone in anyone's life. Patience, acceptance, and understanding are essential in providing a safe haven - the wakeup call may be gradual and the snooze button exists in this situation. Support and education are paramount for all (victims, perpetrators, proximal loved ones, bystanders, support providers, and legal and governmental structures - - religion and it's 'TIL DEATH do us part' could also do with a huge re-think)."*



## Safety Changes Everything

*"A lot of women stay in violent relationships because of the high cost of living. a paid leave for those who need help escaping these situations is a huge step forward."*

*"Anything that helps survivors feel legitimized and supported will help break stigma and secrecy and make better lives for parents & their children, sooner."*

*"These survivors need help or they will go back or continue to find abusive relationships. They need time to heal, regroup, get help and often begin to rebuild."*

*"Domestic violence comes in all forms, where physical violence may leave scars someone can see mental violence can be the hardest to leave. People don't see this part. My family loved my ex I was the loser for leaving. So sometimes "proof" is almost impossible."*

*"You have surgery you get time off. An immediate family member dies you get time off. You have a baby you get time off. The trauma and pain is physical as well as emotional. You can't concentrate on your job when you don't know how you're going to feed your child or keep a roof over their head. When a man violates a woman with his hands and takes away her power she deserves the time to heal and put the pieces back together. Women are the nurturers and backbones to our society, we must support women in being fully empowered and this cannot be if she is stuck in an abusive situation due to finances."*

*"That someone is listening and cares that you won't have to necessarily lose a job, a lifeline really..... Violence against women is an epidemic and comes in too many forms. You can't think of anything beyond the safety of your children and yourself, when going through it."*



## Safety Changes Everything

*"That mental and emotional abuse is also debilitating. That domestic violence requires time to heal from and that women need support down the line as well. Wrap-around care would help ensure that women are able to work through the trauma down the line as well."*

*"It's incredibly debilitating. It sucks your spirit from you if you have no one to talk to. It's really hard to reach out for help and to make yourself vulnerable to again when all you want to do is protect yourself. If the police know of violence they should enrol both parent and child in programs to help the parent process what happened in order to protect the future. These emotions are toxic to be left unprocessed and leave people with PTSD which is a horrible way to parent."*

*"The most important thing is that survivors deserve time to heal and safety from those who are causing harm. Losing funds from experiencing violence is unfair to survivors, who don't deserve the violence or the additional stress of losing income."*

*"If you are doing this it needs to be trauma informed. There can not be barriers, like needing a police report. It needs to be easily accessible. This program would be an amazing thing, if barriers were not put in place."*

*"That healing takes time and space away from where the violence happened. More than 4 weeks are needed to start fresh. Especially with the housing situation in Vancouver. It can take a few months to get a new home."*

*"Survivors of domestic and sexual violence who are in the lower end of the work force as far as wages and benefits go, often don't have paid sick time that can be used for necessary time off, even for related appointments (drs, police, VS, SW, court, counselling.) Often these appointments are only available on limited days, and never evenings or weekends. If they don't go to work they don't get paid, and they are the*



## Safety Changes Everything

*most at risk of losing their job for taking time off. Also, if you tie the benefit to family income, a survivor may be unable to claim it as a result of their partner's income."*

*"It is difficult to prove emotional/psychological abuse, however, these people who suffer from it really need the support. Also, the amount of time and energy that is used dealing with the police, the social workers, victims services, counselling, doctors etc. etc. is draining. The amount of forms needed to fill out when added all together can really be a roadblock to accessing services. When somebody is experiencing trauma their body often really needs sleep to rest and recover along with everything else. This becomes a challenge when kids are involved added to all the requirements to access services."*

*"These survivors are people with real job, lives, and families who never asked for nor deserved what happened to them. They just want their lives to go back to stability. This is one brick in the road forward to wholeness and healing after such a trying time."*

*"How will this work for students? Minors? People with part time jobs? Where will they have to go to apply? Can they apply online? Do they need to drive to the office? Do they have to recount what happened - that is re-traumatizing and difficult to do right after it happened? Do they have to tell their employer?"*

*"We need time to recover. There is plenty of documentation on these issues that supports relaxing requirements for such a leave. The last thing a survivor needs is for experiencing this kind of trauma to be topped by financial hardship. Employers need to develop more awareness of these issues. Without support in this area, survivors experience workplace discrimination and our risk of death and violence is increased."*

*"Don't make it so that people have to choose their safety/survival over financial security/recovery time. Don't make it so that people are forced to do something they don't want to do or are not ready to do*



## Safety Changes Everything

*(ie. report to police) in order to receive paid leave/compensation for time that they need to be able to process what happened and make life altering decisions."*

*"Domestic and sexual violence is traumatic. It is a trauma that can be experienced at once, or for months, or years. If we can look at someone who has been kidnapped, gone to war, experienced or witnessed a horrific death - as people who would most certainly need time and support to process and deal with that trauma, we most certainly need to give this to abuse survivors. I don't know the exact statistic of how many abuse survivors go back to their abuser or seek another partner who yet again abuses them, but I can imagine that their chances of never going back and to get the mental health support they need would reduce those numbers. Another thing to note is that paid leave isn't just to ensure that bills can be paid while someone is dealing with this trauma. It's also to pay for things like counselling. It's extremely expensive and very necessary. I am doing okay financially, have no dependents, and I still need to ensure I have an extra client or contract (I'm a freelancer) JUST to pay for my therapy. It's been two years, and I still need to work extra hours just to pay to maintain my mental health."*

*"Violence is incredibly emotional and of course physically debilitating. It affects every area of your life. Time to process and heal is crucial."*

*"It requires time- days, weeks, months to rebuild your life all over again. If you become a single parent, there is so much you need to balance basically overnight (when you leave) and there is no time to emotionally & physically heal."*





### What concerns do you have?

*"That the province/gov't/organizations do not give you enough time to heal, or at least get to a safe place to come back to work. Violence in a workplace and/or home is a reality to many people we need to be respectful and supportive."*

*"The time off won't be long enough. The services able won't be adequate. Employers won't want to cooperate. This will become an invasive and overwhelming process during an already stressful and difficult time."*

*"My concern is that there will be too many hoops to jump through and that those who really need this will not utilize it due to required reporting."*

*"No concern. I feel like it would be a lifeline...that says ok...financial relief is there while I get on my feet...if I leave...I have that to help me. Great incentive to leave especially because he had control of finances...hard to describe in words ..."*

*"Funny it goes both ways. I worry that women in need of it may be loathe or afraid to claim it and I worry that there will be a certain amount of abuse of the system. Abuse is inevitable, but would be used as a weapon to tear down support for something so important to so many."*

*"How other coworkers and boss would react with me. Living with shame, and not deal with those feeling sorry for me. When I first left my ex, I felt so humiliated, not only because of being physically abused, but dealing with years of his addictions and infidelity, not only with women, but men as well. I moved back home in 2013 after separating in 2009, but I knew that I was over him and was strong enough to move back home."*



*"Someone not believing me that I need it."*

*"If the emphasis is on reporting, documentation, and evidence, it would offer survivors who only experience emotional or less well-documented forms of violence little recourse to prove that they deserve the paid leave."*

*"Making it mandatory to report. Having some employers think they need more information than they do. That people won't be believed. Training should have to be mandatory for employers."*

*"Who pays for it? Will it be apart of the taxes? Will this discourage employers from hiring women? How will the situation remain confidential? How will the province protect the employees from 'layoffs' after they return to work?"*

*"The additional cost to employers. The bureaucracy around accessing it."*

*"In a time of crisis, the last thing you need are additional financial stressors. The cost of moving/finding childcare/ counselling and other medical/therapies all make it very costly to leave an abusive relationship. If leave is unpaid, it makes it nearly impossible."*

*"My concerns would be:*

- that people wouldn't qualify because they didn't have enough proof of abuse.*
- the employer would view the employee differently with access to the information about the abuse (often victims are looked at as though they are to blame).*
- the leave would be difficult to obtain because there are too many hoops to jump through to qualify at a time when a person already has too many things on their plate."*



*"Having not disclose to nameless and faceless bureaucracies just to get a chance to start over and begin to heal. Make the process easy for the victims. They have enough other crap on their plates during recovery. Don't make the process another burden to be shouldered."*

*"Because I've always worked part time and contractor jobs, I'm concerned that these positions somehow won't qualify. Right now I have four jobs, how would that work? Would I take paid leave from all of them?"*

*"People in the company may talk/ spread rumours about the victim to discredit their time away from work. So there must be a privacy policy enforced to protect them from every angle."*

*"I could imagine that employers may be worried that someone who hasn't actually gone through this trauma may take advantage of it, but I would urge that they consider it with the same rule of honesty as they do with sick leave. I understand that employers will want the equivalent of a doctor's note after x number of days of absence, but perhaps there is a middle ground. If a signed letter from a support worker that eludes that the person needs paid time off for mental health is enough, I would support that. I think asking abuse victims to provide a note that discloses their situation is asking a lot of that person, and would probably further their trauma and make it uncomfortable to return to work."*

*"I hope it does not affect the survivor once they resume working. Does it have to be disclosed to everyone? Will it be written down in their file? Do they get treated differently afterwards?"*



### Support Worker Perspectives

#### What do you want the province to know?

*"This a fantastic idea to help survivors cope and put their lives back together. People experiencing this type of violence often have multiple marginalized identities, and economic support in this way will help address their struggles, heal, and move towards a place of self-sufficiency."*

*"Surviving relationship violence is extremely stressful. Adding more of a financial strain on these people adds even more stress. The last thing they should have to worry about is if they will lose out on income or their job if they need time to better their situation"*

*"Victims don't usually leave their abusers the 1st time [or 3rd or...] so the provision would have to be supportive and more than a one time benefit."*

#### What are your concerns?

*"Our most vulnerable will still fall through the cracks."*

*"That a person's ability to apply be easy, accessible and the process be incredibly respectful. Safety from secondary trauma is paramount. Access to free therapeutic support in the form most healing as identified by the individual should be connected."*



**BATTEREDWOMEN'S  
SUPPORTSERVICES**



**Safety Changes Everything**

*"That it will be difficult to access, that clients applying for it won't be treated with dignity, that it won't be inclusive, that there will be a burden of proof to access it that will re-traumatize clients, that clients will be forced to report even if they aren't ready to in order to access it."*

*"That survivors will be re-traumatized by a bureaucratic command and control approach."*

## Acknowledgements

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