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Family Violence and the Deaf

Legal Education and Information Issues: A national Needs Assessment

Innovations, Analysis and Integration

Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) Program

Family Violence Initiative

Justice Canada

2000

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p. 1 - 1.0

“In a survey by the DisAbled Women’s Network (DAWN) in 1985 it was estimated that “women with disabilities are *1.5 to 10 times* as likely to be abused as non-disabled women, depending on whether they live in the community or in institutions”.<sup>1</sup>

1. cited in National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV), “Family Violence Against Women With Disabilities”, November, 1992, [online] [February 2000] Available at <http://www.hcsc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/index.html>.

p. 2

“The focus of the current project is on family violence in the deaf community.”

p. 4

“The generally accepted number for prevalence of deafness in Canada, which precludes use of speech and hearing, without special intervention is 1/1000 (MacDougall, 1990, 1999).”

p. 5

### “**1.1.2 Socio-economic status**

With some notable exceptions, deaf persons as a group do not enjoy high socioeconomic status in Canada. In a recent study of 1000 deaf Canadians the Canadian Association of the Deaf found that 80% were either unemployed or underemployed.”

p. 7

“The field of education of the deaf in Canada and elsewhere has been undergoing a dramatic evolution during the past 25 years. The educational model has moved from free standing residential schools for the deaf to mainstreaming, integration and inclusion. Many residential schools for the deaf have closed in Canada (with some notable exceptions, e.g. Newfoundland).”

p. 9 – Current Project

The current project focuses on those individuals who are profoundly deaf and who use sign language. The objectives of the present project are as follows:

- to obtain general information on family violence and deafness from a Public Legal Education and Information perspective.
- to gather general information on any existing initiatives from various regions of the country.
- to canvass experts, service providers, families and the deaf community about their legal education information needs with respect to family violence.

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- to provide a brief bibliography and listing of resources which will summarize current and best practices in the area.
- to provide information which can serve as the basis for making future recommendations concerning the Public Legal Education and Information needs of deaf persons on family violence issues.”

#### p. 10 METHODOLOGY

...use of focused groups at key settings

#### p. 12 – FINDINGS

“There are no reliable statistics on the nature and extent of deafness-related family violence incidents in Canada.”

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“There is a consensus that general education materials regarding family violence are not readily available to deaf persons due to problems in literacy (MacDougall, 1991) and also lack of materials in ASL/LSQ.”

“There is a lack of appropriately trained personnel in the field. Most hearing professionals do not know how to deal with deaf persons and many hold false stereotypes concerning deafness. Even where interpreters are used, often the overall communication situation is far from adequate (Barnett, 1999; Kennedy, 1992).”

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“The lack of accessibility of shelters is often mentioned (Masuda & Ridington). Furthermore, accessibility is often confined to technical issues i.e. provision of TTY (telephone device for the deaf), flashing lights etc. The issue of greatest concern is the training and sensitivity of staff.”

“The issue of restraints when arrests occur is mentioned often. If deaf people are in handcuffs or have their arms or hands otherwise restrained they absolutely cannot communicate. The resulting mis-communication with the abuser can have a detrimental effect on the victim as well.”

“Early experiences of abuse either in the family or in residential schools is mentioned

by all participants as a serious causative factor which needs to be addressed. Many deaf people who suffered abuse feel that they now deserve abuse and are very reluctant to report. This parallels the situation often reported for other ethnocultural minority groups (Roboubi & Bowles, 1995). The need for appropriate education and information in these situations is acute (Hill, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).”

“Lack of sexual education in the school system whether in the residential school or in the mainstream setting is often mentioned as a significant factor to be addressed in terms of prevention of future family violence (Hill,1999a, 1999b, 1999c).”

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“The issue of what constitutes abuse is a pervasive one. There is a profound lack of knowledge of the varieties of abuse, how to deal with abuse and how to report abuse to the appropriate authorities (Doe, 2000). Again the situation here parallels that for other minority groups but because of the early educational and linguistic deprivation, for many deaf people (MacDougall,1991), the situation is particularly troubling.”

P. 17

“There is an urgent need for more trained deaf professionals, e.g. lawyers, doctors, social workers who will be able to assist deaf victims of violence more effectively.”

P. 18

“Virtually every agency and individual contacted mentioned the reality of past abuse in the school system.”

P. 20

“Working with deaf and family violence advocacy groups and promoting early intervention with awareness and prevention programs in the school system were also prime concerns.”

## **5.0 Availability of Materials and Information**

“The main problem in this area is not only the availability of materials, but also the development of an effective system for distributing information.”

P. 22+ **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

....an extensive list of recommendations is provided