

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women has found certain themes regarding contemporary family life reflected in the most recent Statistics Canada data presented in the publication, *Women in Prince Edward Island, A Statistical Review*. These are:

**Most Island families do not conform to an idealized family structure composed of one breadwinner, a homemaker, and a group of children.**

- Only one in ten Island families have a father who works and a mother who stays home to keep house and care for the children
- Without women's earnings, three times as many Island husband-wife families would fall below the poverty line
- Approximately one in ten Island children grows up in a family headed by a single parent, usually the mother

**Divorce is a common occurrence for adults and children.**

- Up to 40% of Canadian marriages end in divorce
- The Island's divorce rate has increased by four times since 1970
- Half of Canada's couples that separate have children

**People are opting for common-law partnerships as an alternative to marriage.**

- There is one common-law couple for every eight married couples in Canada
- Common-law couples are increasing faster than married ones and separate at a higher rate
- More than 41% of common-law couples have children in the home

**Ending a relationship makes women and their children more likely to be poor.**

- On PEI, the average annual income of female-headed lone-parent families is \$10,000 less than male-headed lone-parent families and \$20,000 less than husband-wife families

- While female lone parents represent only 11% of families in Prince Edward Island, 40% of all the children living in poverty are in female-headed lone-parent families
- Two-fifths of the Island children who are living in poverty have lone-parent mothers

**Many women experience violence within their relationships.**

- 51% of Island women aged 16 and over have experienced some type of violence
- 29% of all Canadian women formally report physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital partner (common-law unions included)
- For 10% of these women, the violence was so severe they expressed fear for their personal safety and their lives
- In Canada, almost one woman in three is at some point the victim of a physical or sexual assault by a partner or a former partner
- The majority of Prince Edward Island's Victim Services cases opened for women were for wife abuse
- In reported abuse cases, most Island women were abused by their husband or ex-boyfriend

In addition, the Advisory Council presents these undeniable realities about women's lives:

**In the midst of all these changes in family structures, women remain the primary caretakers of children.**

- Regardless of legal custody arrangement, mothers overwhelmingly retain responsibility for children and caregiving as confirmed in four separate studies (Lero & Johnson, 1995; Marck-Gratton & Le Bourdais, 1999; Marshall, 1993a; 1993b; Silver, 2000)

**Violence tends to escalate at times of separation.**

- Between 1974 and 1992, the rate of women killed by husbands while separated was six times higher than the rate of women killed by husbands while co-residing (Statistics Canada, 1996)

- One-third of children killed, were killed following parental separation (Cooper, 1994)

**Women are poorer than men before and after separation.**

- Canadian women's incomes remain less than 60% of men's incomes (Statistics Canada, 1995; 2000)
- While there is no large difference between the earnings of single women and single men, married women on Prince Edward Island earn substantially less than married men in all age categories (Statistics Canada, 1993)
- Three years after marital separation, the incomes of Canadian women and children had dropped by at least 30% while, on average, men's incomes more than doubled those of their former wives' incomes (Gorlick, 1995)

For true equity to exist, services and legislation must recognize and respond to the realities of contemporary family life and the realities of women's lives.