EDMONTON: SAFE CITY

UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces

SCOPING STUDY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"It's Time"

Alberta Government

Edmonton

Edmonton: Safe City Executive Summary

In July 2016, in partnership with Alberta Status of Women, Edmonton became the second city in Canada to participate in the United Nations (UN) Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative. This initiative supports comprehensive approaches to the prevention of, and response to, sexual violence in city's public spaces around the world.

Member cities begin their work by conducting a scoping study to develop a clearer picture of sexual violence in public spaces in their city. Working closely with stakeholders, member cities then develop strategies to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces.

Phase I

Edmonton's scoping study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 looked at developing a picture of sexual violence against women and girls in all of their diversity in Edmonton, and determining potential areas for further research. Following a literature review on sexual violence in Edmonton's public spaces, organizations and individuals with specific expertise in the area of sexual violence were engaged. This consisted of nine focus groups, eight interviews, four meetings with stakeholder organizations and 10 written submissions. A qualitative thematic analysis of the findings of the literature review and the stakeholder data collection revealed:

- The most frequent types of sexual harassment that occur in public spaces include: verbal harassment, unwanted sexual remarks, groping, and other forms of unwanted touching, and repeated following/stalking with sexual aggression.

- The places in which women and girls are subjected to sexual violence include transitional space (for example, to and from school, work and home), public transit, taxis and ride-sharing services, the central areas of Edmonton, indoor public spaces, such as malls and recreation centres, and bars and restaurants.

- Some groups of women and girls have been made more vulnerable than others, including Indigenous women and girls, girls between the ages of 13 and 18 years, young women ages 18–25 years, women who do not appear Caucasian and gender minorities.

- The most common reason women do not report an incident of sexual violence is the fear they will not be believed or they will be blamed.

- Sexual violence is seen as a 'normalized', 'everywhere' and 'expected' part of everyday life, and as being endemic in our society. Women's persistent fear of sexual violence affects the

way women use or avoid public spaces and their participation in community/civic life.

- There is a data gap in sexual violence, including collection of data on sexual harassment.

Based on the analysis, three priority areas for further research were identified for Phase II.

- Indigenous women and girls as a group who has been made more vulnerable;
- Transportation (the various ways that people move) including but not limited to public transit, taxis and ride-sharing services as sites for sexual violence; and
- Issues related to responding to and reporting of sexual violence.

Phase II

To develop a more in-depth picture of sexual violence against women and girls, researchers examined existing policies and plans, and evaluated strategies in each priority area.

Indigenous Women & Girls

Across Canada there is heightened awareness of the need to respond to the serious and prevalent issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls. A number of strategies and actions led by federal and provincial governments, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations including community and grassroots organizations are underway. Recommended local approaches could include:

- Research and data collection activities to support the design and development of culturally appropriate programs and services.
- Provision of support and culturally appropriate programs and services.
- Initiatives that address root causes.
- Policing and justice related initiatives to make the justice system more responsive.

Transportation

Transportation (the various ways that people move) including but not limited to public transit, taxis and ride-sharing services as sites for sexual violence is an issue in Edmonton and around the world. More broadly, transportation encompasses the movement to and from sites of transit along with the various modes people use to get from one place to another. Preventing and addressing sexual violence in the local context could include the following strategies and initiatives:

- Transit safety features and initiatives
- Taxi and ride hailing safety features and initiatives
- Transit safety awareness campaigns

Reporting and responding to sexual violence

Reporting refers to providing a formal account or statement about an incident of sexual violence to an organization or institution that has the authority to take action to address the incident. Responding refers to the process of providing support for women who have experienced sexual violence. Based on the research findings the following strategies and initiatives could be undertaken:

- Police initiatives/collaborative initiatives with police services to encourage reporting and addressing barriers.
- Digital/online reporting systems such as apps and online sites.

Next steps

A Collaboration Committee will bring together expertise from government, civil society organizations, police, and other partners to focus on the three priority areas, and to propose actions informed by the research that further the vision of Edmonton: Safe City.