

Most women in shelters fear being killed: Study

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A study that found more than three-quarters of women surveyed in shelters believed they were at risk of being murdered should be a wake-up call to the federal government, advocates say.

The YWCA study released Thursday states that of the 368 women interviewed at shelters across the country from January to August 2005, 77 per cent said they feared they were in "serious danger of homicide" from an abusive partner.

"We know that no matter what area of the country we are in, it is a problem," YWCA Canada CEO Paulette Senior said Thursday. "So we need to have the government respond and be supportive of the development of a strategy that will respond to the issue."

Senior said the results of the study were an eye-opener even to shelter workers.

"We who actually do this work were surprised by how high it is," she said.

The study, conducted by Prof. Leslie Tutty of the University of Calgary, found the primary abuser of the women to be a common-law male partner or ex-partner.

Seventeen per cent of the women were married. Most of the women were aboriginal or white, while 10 per cent were immigrants and 70 per cent were on social assistance.

About 75 per cent of the women had suffered physical abuse, and in one-third of the cases, the women said their partner prevented them from seeking medical help for their injuries.

"The general public has little understanding of the fear and degradation commonly experienced by women abused by their intimate partners," Tutty said in a release.

The study shows the importance of shelters, which abused women often go to as a last resort, Senior said.

"We know that the shelters are actually saving women's lives," she said.

But she also said that limited space at shelters means some women are turned away.

Included in the study are 14 recommendations for reducing risks to women, such as providing social supports like better access to affordable housing and day care, and advocating for federal and provincial governments to launch public awareness campaigns about violence against women.

Statistics Canada figures show that in 2003, 64 women were killed by a male partner.