

## **Learning Network**

Facilitate. Educate. Collaborate.

### **Keeping Children & Mothers Safe and Engaging Men who use Abusive Behaviours: VAW and CAS Perspectives**

Learning Network Brief 15

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The Learning Network is an initiative of the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children, based at the Faculty of Education, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada.

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## Executive Summary

The Learning Network is a knowledge mobilization initiative that provides resources and information to extend the reach of training and public education on violence against women (VAW) ([www.vawlearningnetwork.ca](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca)). An objective of the Learning Network is to bring together professionals to identify and share innovative practices and approaches, develop frameworks, and identify emerging needs in preventing gender-based violence. On September 19, 2013, the Learning Network hosted a forum ***Keeping Children and Mothers Safe and Engaging Men who use Abusive Behaviours: VAW and CAS Collaboration*** which brought together 144 professionals from nine regions across the province who represented the VAW, CAS, and government sectors.

The overall objectives of the forum were to understand VAW and CAS collaboration within a gender-based analysis, identify principles and practice strategies for engaging men who use abusive behaviours, identify risk factors and potential assessment tools for evaluating child risk in the context of domestic violence, and identifying promising practices in VAW and CAS collaboration.

During the one-day forum, speakers presented on the history and context of VAW and CAS collaboration, barriers and strategies to engaging abusive men, risk assessment and management including collaboration between the family and criminal courts, an example of a risk assessment tool and strategy for children exposed to domestic violence that involves VAW and CAS collaboration, and reflections by representatives from the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Homes (OAITH) and the Ontario Association for Children's Aid Societies (OACAS).

The Learning Network team developed a survey for forum participants to gain an understanding of their perspectives on the status of VAW and CAS collaboration in their communities. The survey contained

questions regarding the extent to which collaboration is rooted in a gender analysis and a comprehensive understanding of risk and risk management strategies; perceived barriers and suggested solutions to collaboration; and the extent of community engagement with men who use abusive behaviours in order to promote safety.

Just over half of the survey respondents were from the VAW sector (51%), 41% of respondents were from CAS, and 7% were government representatives. For the most part, results of the survey were categorized into responses from both VAW and CAS sectors, VAW sector only, and CAS sector only.

An overview of the survey results follows:

- **Collaboration:** The majority of respondents felt that VAW and CAS collaboration within their communities was either “improved but still requiring substantial improvement” or “sufficient to promote safety”. However, frontline staff viewed collaboration as significantly less developed than Supervisors/Team Leaders and Senior Managers.
- **Gender Analysis:** When asked if VAW and CAS collaboration is rooted in a gender analysis, the majority of survey respondents felt that there was a substantial need for improvement, particularly those from the VAW sector and respondents in frontline and senior management positions.
- **Engagement of Men who Use Abusive Behaviour:** The majority of respondents felt there was limited to nonexistent engagement of men who use abusive behaviours. CAS respondents perceived more progress in this area than did VAW respondents.
- **Understanding Risk and Risk Management Strategies:** Responses indicated that risk and protective factors are better understood than risk management strategies. While both sectors viewed understanding as improved, the majority felt that collaborations required substantial improvement in the understanding of risk/protective factors and risk management strategies.
- **Barriers and Challenges to Collaboration:** The barrier/challenge identified by the majority of respondents was limited resources (e.g., funding, intervention tools). Other barriers/challenges included: limited collaboration (e.g., limited open dialogue between sectors), insufficient training (e.g.,

culturally competent training, cross-sector training on mandates, policies, and protocols), limited information sharing between sectors (e.g., lack of joint case conferencing), and fear and/or suspicions of each sector's objectives and mandates (e.g., lack of trust across sectors).

- **Potential Solutions to Barriers:** The majority of respondents from both VAW and CAS sectors identified joint VAW and CAS training as a potential solution to barriers. Other solutions identified included resources, training within a sector, community cross training, and developing and/or amending policies and protocols. The respondents who identified training suggested that it focus on engaging abusive men, assessment tools, and gender-based analysis. The most requested resources by those respondents who identified a need for more resources were intervention tools and funding.
- **Most Beneficial Collaboration Strategies:** When asked to identify collaboration strategies that have resulted in the greatest benefit for families, the majority of respondents identified *trusting relationships and an understanding of respective VAW and CAS roles*.

## Introduction

The Learning Network is a knowledge mobilization initiative based in the work and innovation of the Domestic Violence Advisory Council (DVAC). The purpose of the Learning Network is to increase the effectiveness and reach of public education and professional training materials developed to address violence against women (VAW). One of the main objectives of the Learning Network is to promote networks and to identify core competencies and standards of practice, share innovative approaches, develop evaluation frameworks, and identify emerging needs in preventing gender-based violence.

On September 19, 2013, the Learning Network hosted an all-day forum in London, Ontario on Violence Against Women (VAW) and Children's Aid Societies (CAS) collaboration (<http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/speaker-slide-presentations-vaw-and-cas-collaboration>). The focus of the forum was on keeping children and mothers safe and engaging men who use abusive behaviours. The overall learning objectives included: understanding the issue within a gender-based analysis; identifying principles and practice strategies for engaging men who use violence; identifying risk factors and potential assessment tools for evaluating child risk in the context of domestic violence; and identifying promising practices in VAW and CAS collaboration.

The Learning Network invited five speakers to present on the issue. To begin the forum, Deborah Sinclair, an independent practice social worker and consultant, and Lisa Tomlinson, a Supervisor with the Toronto Children's Aid Society, provided a history and context of VAW and CAS collaboration in Ontario, including achievements and current challenges. The presentation highlighted the historical and expanding collaboration between sectors including the importance of collaboration and understanding that the differing mandates of each sector should not be seen as a hindrance to collaboration when supporting women and children and engaging abusive men.

Following the historical and current context of VAW and CAS collaboration, Dr. Susan Strega, from the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria, discussed the importance of engaging fathers in order to protect children effectively. Dr. Strega highlighted the reasons to engage fathers how use abusive behaviour in child protection, the barriers

to their engagement, and principles and practice strategies for their engagement.

Dr. Peter Jaffe, the Academic Director at the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children, presented on the importance of risk assessment and risk management to prevent violence against women and children, specifically homicides that occur in the context of domestic violence. Dr. Jaffe highlighted the importance of collaboration and information sharing among the criminal and family courts when protecting children and mothers and managing high-risk abusive men.

Maddie Bell, a children's domestic violence consultant from Barnardo's Northern Ireland, presented an example of a promising assessment strategy, called Barnardo's Domestic Violence Risk Identification Matrix (DVRIM) that evaluates risk for children exposed to domestic violence, risk for adult victims experiencing domestic violence, and outlines when CAS interventions are required. .

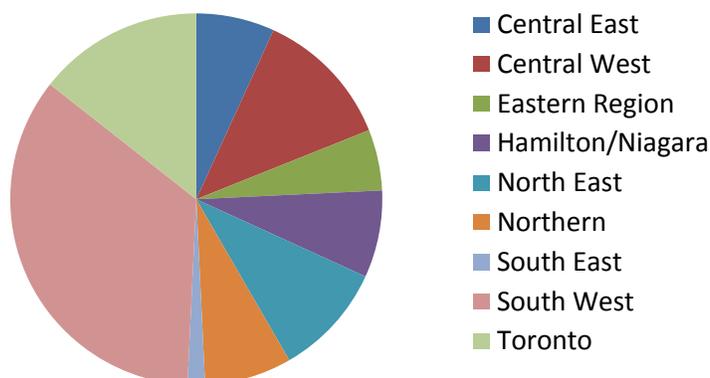
To wrap up the forum, Susan Young, Director of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), and Nancy Friedman, a Manager at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, provided summaries and reflections of the day from the viewpoint of both the VAW and CAS sectors.

Please visit the following link to view speaker slide presentations - <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/speaker-slide-presentations-vaw-and-cas-collaboration>.

## Participants

There were 132 participants that attended the forum including representatives from the Violence Against Women sector (44%); representatives from Children's Aid Societies (42%); representatives from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (6%) and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2%), and members of the Learning Network's Provincial Advisory Group (Resource Group) (5%). Participants came from all regions of the province (Central East, Central West, Eastern, Hamilton/Niagara, North East, Northern, South East, South West, and Toronto) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Representation from Province Regions (percent)



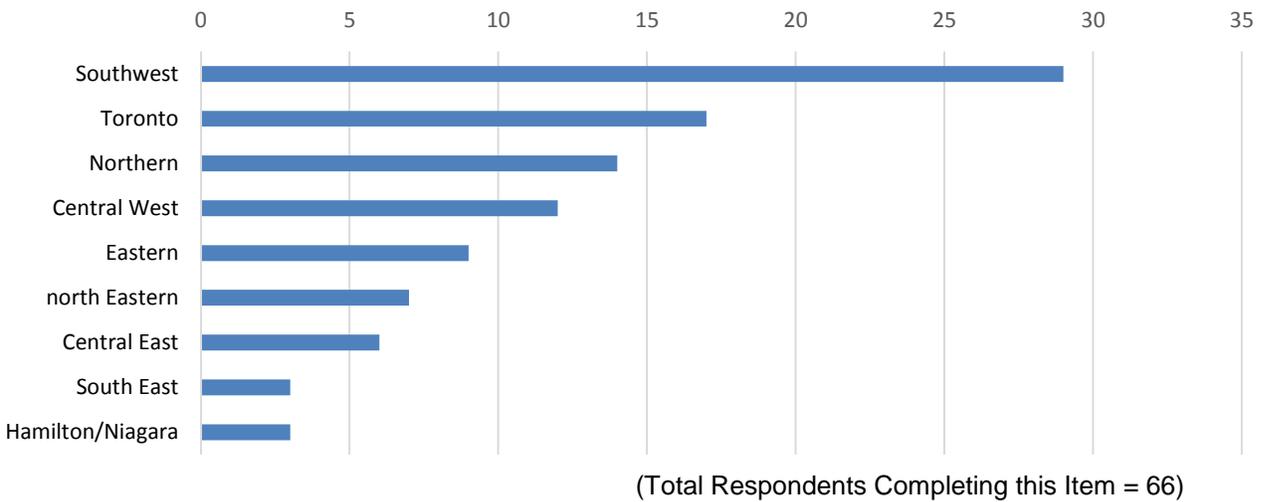
### Survey: Participant Perceptions of VAW & CAS Collaboration

During the forum, participants were asked to complete a survey on VAW and CAS collaboration to keep children and mothers safe and engaging men who use abusive behaviours. The survey was developed to get the perspectives of forum participants on VAW and CAS collaboration in their communities including: the extent to which the collaboration is rooted in a gender analysis and on a comprehensive understanding of risk and protective factors and risk management strategies; barriers to VAW and CAS collaboration; and perceived solutions. Participants' perspectives on community and sectoral engagement with abusive men in order to protect children and mothers were also surveyed. See Appendix A to view a copy of the survey. The majority of respondents completed the survey during the forum and a few respondents completed the survey online shortly following the forum. Where relevant, the data was categorized into combined responses from VAW and CAS respondents, VAW respondents, and CAS respondents.

### Description of survey respondents

Seventy forum participants completed the forum survey with 51% of the respondents from the VAW sector, 41% from the CAS sector, and 7% from government. Out of the nine regions represented at the forum, the majority of survey respondents were from the Southwest region of the province (29%) followed by Toronto (17%), Northern (14%), Central West (12%), Eastern (9%), North Eastern (7%), Central East (6%), South East (3%), and Hamilton/Niagara (3%) regions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Regions Represented by Survey Respondents (percent)



The majority of respondents work in the VAW sector (51%) followed by the CAS sector (41%). A small percentage of respondents are government representatives (7%) (see Figure 3). Thirty percent of respondents stated that they have worked in both the VAW and CAS sectors with 70% stating that they have only worked in one sector (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: Survey Respondents by Sector/Role (percent)

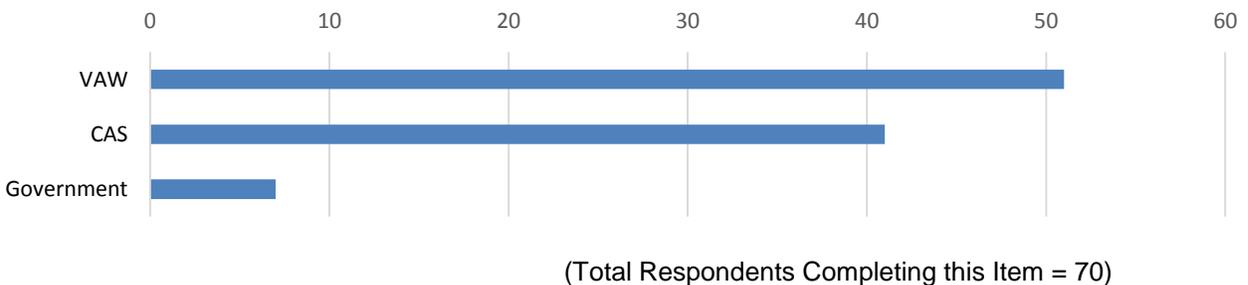
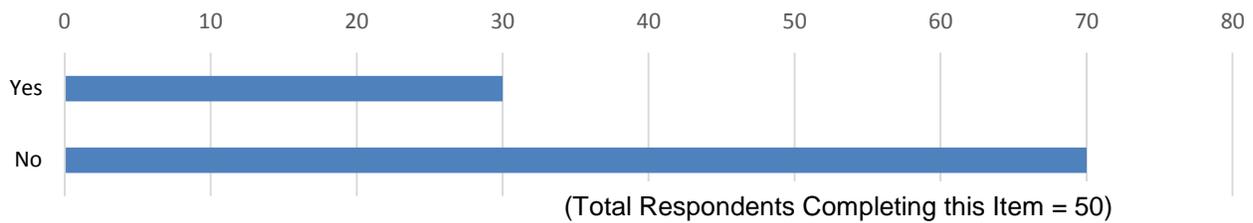
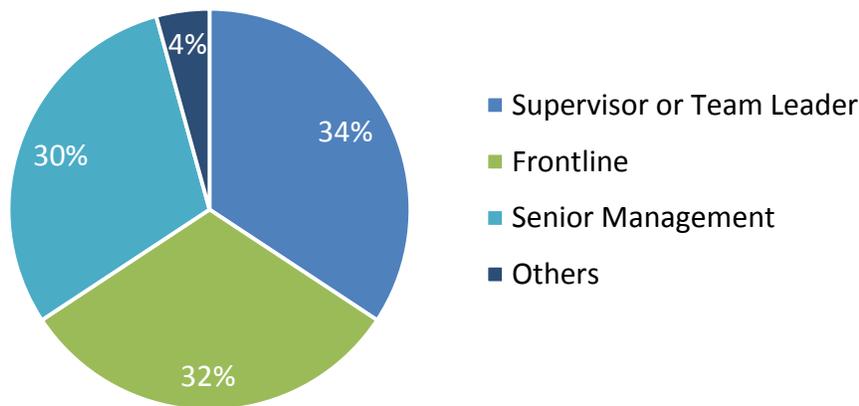


Figure 4: Survey Respondents who have Worked in Both Sectors (percent)



There was an almost equal representation of respondents who work in a supervisor/team leader (34%; 24), frontline (31%; 22), and senior management role (30%; 21) within either the VAW or CAS sectors (See Figure 5). The majority of respondents reported having worked in their respective sector between 10 to 20 years, with only 10% reporting under five years of service (see Figure 6).

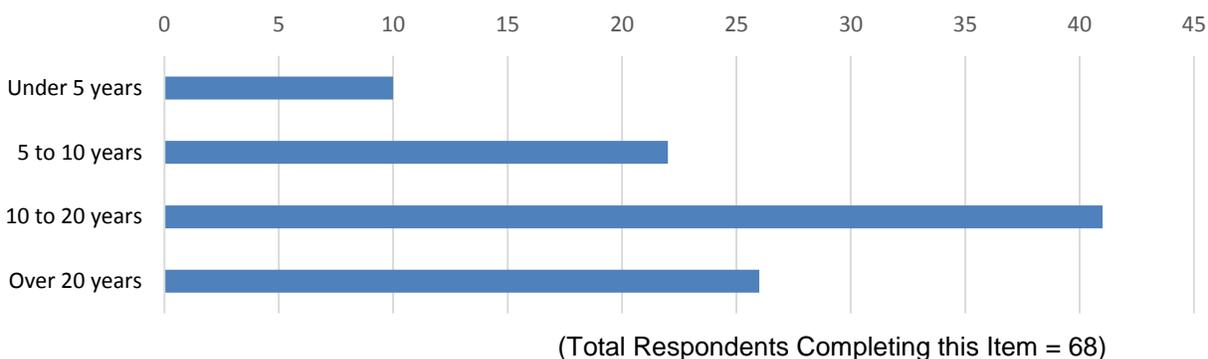
Figure 5: Respondent Roles (percent)



(Total Respondents Completing this Item = 70)

The majority of respondents reported having worked in their respective sector between 10 to 20 years, with more than twice the respondents reporting 10 or more years of service (N=46) than those reporting 10 or less years of service (N = 22) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Length of Time Respondents Worked in Current Sector (percent)



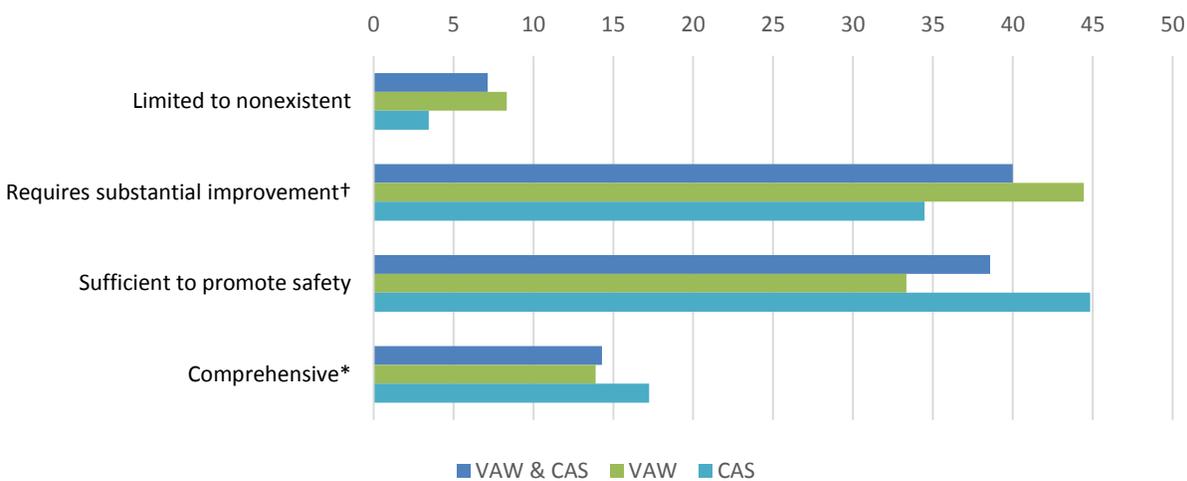
## Results of the Survey: Perspectives of the VAW and CAS sectors around collaboration and engaging abusive men

### 1. VAW and CAS Collaboration

The survey asked respondents about their experiences with collaboration within their own community. The majority of respondents were split between viewing VAW and CAS collaboration as “improved but still requiring substantial improvement” (N=28; 40%) or as “sufficient to promote safety” (N= 27; 38%). While the percentages differ, 5 of the 36 VAW respondents and 5 of the 29 CAS respondents viewed collaboration to be “comprehensive” (i.e., supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behavior, and the children exposed to the abuse) (see Figure 7). No representatives of government rated collaboration as “comprehensive” and equal numbers of this group selected “improved but still requires substantial improvement” (2 of 5) and “sufficient to promote safety” (2 of 5), with one rating “limited to nonexistent”.

Frontline staff viewed VAW and CAS collaboration to be significantly less developed than did Supervisors/Team Leaders and Senior Managers. For instance, 68% (15 of 22) of frontline staff indicated collaboration was “limited to nonexistent” or “improved but requires substantial improvement” compared to 33% (8 of 24) and 38% (8 of 21) of Supervisors/Team Leaders and Senior Managers, respectively.

Figure 7: Respondents Ratings of Community Collaboration (percent)



(Total respondents Completing this Item = 70)

## 2. Extent VAW and CAS Collaboration is Rooted in a Gender Analysis

The survey asked respondents to what extent VAW and CAS collaboration in their communities was rooted in a gender analysis.

Gender analysis refers to the anti-oppression/anti-racism framework with which woman abuse is best understood. A gender-based analysis is “a process that assesses the differential impact of proposed and/or existing policies, programs and legislation on women and men. It makes it possible for policy to be undertaken with an appreciation of gender differences, of the nature of relationships between women and men and of their different social realities, life expectations and economic circumstances. It is a tool for understanding social processes and for responding with informed and equitable options.” (Status of Women Canada, 1996, pg. 4)<sup>♦</sup>

The majority of respondents (43%) felt that the extent to which sectoral collaboration in their community was rooted in gender analysis had “improved but requires substantial improvement” while 37% felt that their gender-based analysis was at a level “sufficient to promote safety” (see Figure 8).

<sup>†</sup> Improved but still requires substantial improvement

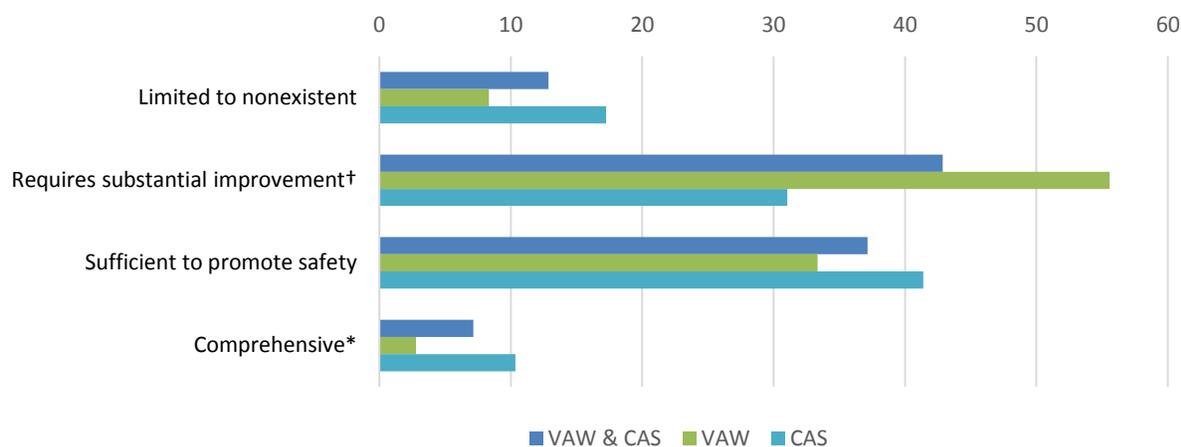
\* Comprehensive (supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behaviour, & the children exposed to the abuse)

<sup>♦</sup> Status of Women Canada (1996). Gender-based analysis: A guide for policy making.

[http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/IWRM/Toolboxes/gender/gender\\_based\\_analysis.pdf](http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/IWRM/Toolboxes/gender/gender_based_analysis.pdf)

While slightly more CAS than VAW respondents selected “limited to nonexistent”, VAW respondents (56%; 20 of 36) were more likely than CAS respondents (31%; 9 of 29) to describe the gender analysis characterizing their collaboration as “improved but still requires substantial improvement”. With respect to a gender analysis, frontline (14 of 22) and senior manager (11 of 21) respondents most often selected “improved but still requires substantial improvement” while the majority of supervisors/team leaders (16 of 24) selected “sufficient to promote safety”.

Figure 8: Extent to which Respondents felt that Collaboration was Rooted in Gender Analysis (percent)



(Total Respondents Completing this Item = 70)

### 3. Barriers to Collaboration

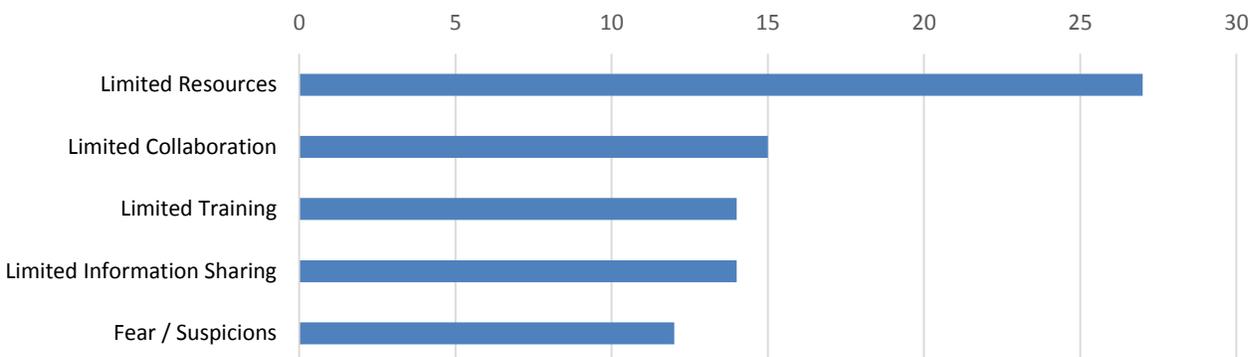
Respondents were asked to identify the top three challenges/barriers they currently experience in VAW and CAS collaboration to keep children and mothers safe. The majority of respondents (n=27) described limited resources as a challenge/barrier (e.g., funding, intervention tools), followed by *limited collaboration* (n=15) (e.g., *little open dialogue between sectors*), insufficient training (n=14) (e.g., culturally competent training, cross-sector training on mandates, policies, and protocols), limited information sharing between sectors (n=14) (e.g., lack of case conferencing), and fear and/or suspicions of each sector’s objectives and mandates (n=12) (e.g., lack of trust across sectors) (see Figure 9). Other identified barriers were reported

† Improved but still requires substantial improvement

\* Comprehensive (supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behaviour, & the children exposed to the abuse)

by fewer than 5 respondents, with the majority being reported by only one respondent.

Figure 9: Barriers to Collaboration Identified by Respondents (frequency)



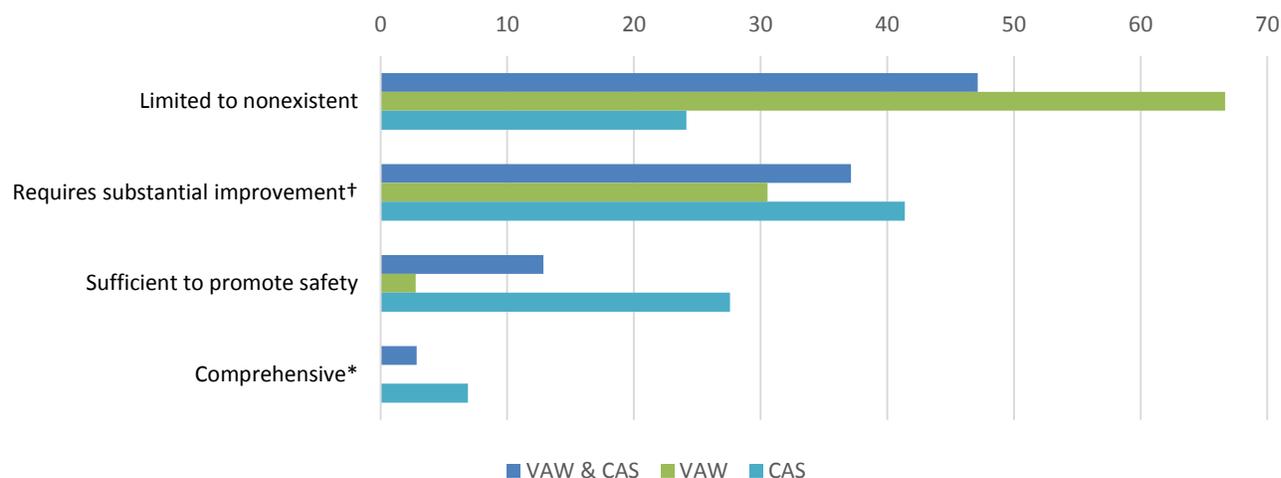
#### 4. Engagement of Men who Use Abusive Behaviour

Respondents were asked to describe the extent to which their community engages with men who use abusive behaviour. Overall respondents felt that engagement with abusive men in their communities was “limited to nonexistent” (47%; 33 of 70) or “improved but still requiring substantial improvement” (37%; 26 of 70). This finding was explained by VAW responses, with 67% (24 of 36) stating that engagement with abusive men was “limited to nonexistent” in their communities (as compared to 21%, 7 of 29, of CAS respondents). CAS respondents (41%; 12 of 29) were more likely than VAW respondents (31%; 11 of 36) to report the engagement of men who use abusive behavior as “improved but still requires substantial improvement”, and more likely to report engagement as “sufficient to promote safety” (28% vs 3%). No respondents from the VAW sector and only 7% of respondents from the CAS sector felt that engagement with abusive men in their communities was “comprehensive” (see Figure 10):

<sup>†</sup> Improved but still requires substantial improvement

\* Comprehensive (supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behaviour, & the children exposed to the abuse)

Figure 10: Engagement of Abusive Men in Respondents' communities (percent)



## 5. Understanding of Risk and Protective Factors (Total Respondents Completing this Item = 70)

Respondents were asked to describe the extent to which the VAW and CAS collaboration in their communities is based on a comprehensive understanding of risk indicators and protective factors. The majority of respondents felt that their community's understanding of risk and protective factors is "improved but still requires substantial improvement" (51%; 36 of 70) while 29% (20 of 70) of respondents felt that their community's understanding was "sufficient to promote engagement" (see Figure 11). Only 6% (4 of 70) of respondents felt that the understanding of risk and protective factors in their community was "comprehensive" and 14% (10 of 70) felt it was "limited to nonexistent".

VAW and CAS respondents' view on the extent to which VAW and CAS collaboration is based on a comprehensive understanding of risk and protective factors was similar, with both sectors indicating either a need for "substantial improvement" (50% VAW, 52% CAS) or that understanding of risk and protective factors is "sufficient to promote safety" (33% VAW, 27% CAS).

† Improved but still requires substantial improvement

\* Comprehensive (supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behaviour, & the children exposed to the abuse)

Figure 11: Extent to which Collaboration is based on Comprehensive Understanding of Risk and Protective Factors (percent)



(Total Respondents Completing this Item = 70)

## 6. Understanding of Risk Management Strategies

Forty-seven percent of respondents (33 of 70) felt that the extent to which the VAW and CAS collaboration in their communities is based on a comprehensive understanding of risk management strategies is “improved but still requires substantial improvement” and 26% (18 of 70) of respondents felt that it was “limited to nonexistent” (see Figure 12). Almost half of the VAW and CAS respondents (47% and 48% respectively) selected “improved but still requires substantial improvement”. Only 20% (14 of 70) of respondents felt that the understanding of risk management strategies in their community was “sufficient to promote safety” and only 7% (5 of 70) of respondents felt it was “comprehensive”.

<sup>†</sup> Improved but still requires substantial improvement

\* Comprehensive (supports promising practices for women experiencing violence, the men who use abusive behaviour, & the children exposed to the abuse)

Figure 12: Extent to which Collaboration is based on a Comprehensive Understanding of Risk Management Strategies (percent)

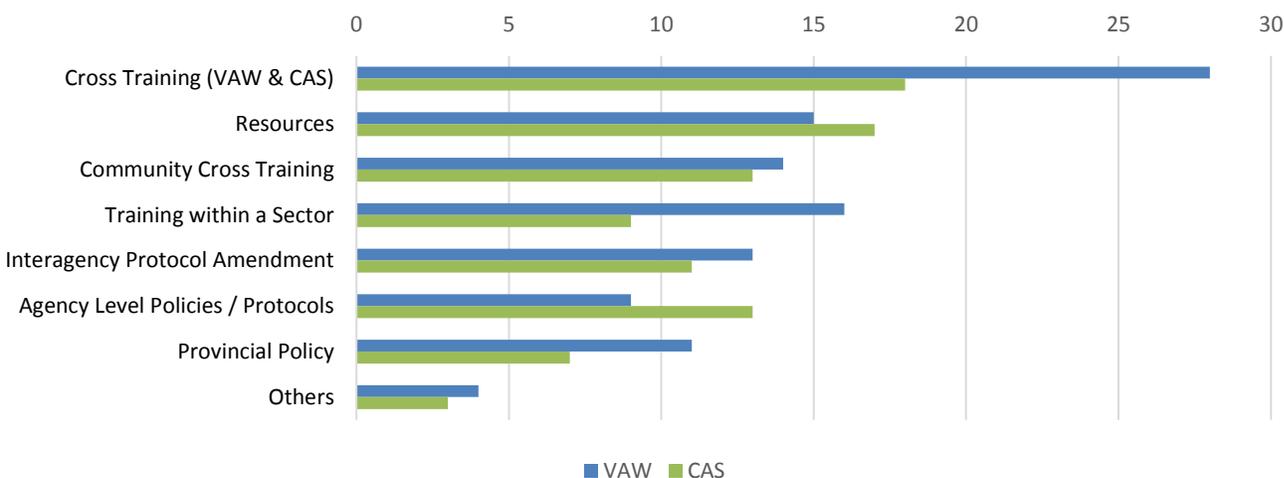


(Total Respondents Completing this Item = 70)

## Solutions to Barriers in VAW & CAS Collaboration

Respondents were asked to identify potential solutions to barriers in VAW and CAS collaboration from the following list: cross training (VAW & CAS), resources, community cross training, training within a sector, interagency protocol amendment, agency level policies/protocols, provincial policy, others. Respondents could choose as many solutions as they wished. The majority of respondents from both the VAW and CAS sectors identified joint training for VAW and CAS as a solution to collaboration barriers (n=28 VAW; n=18 CAS). Respondents from the VAW sector felt that the next most important solution to barriers in collaboration is training within a sector (n=16) followed by resources (n=15); community cross-training (n=14); interagency protocol amendments (n=13); provincial policy (n=11); and developing agency level policies and protocols (n=9). Respondents from the CAS sector identified resources as the next most important solution to barriers in collaboration (n=17), followed by community cross training (n=13), developing agency level policies and protocols (n=13), interagency protocol amendment (n=11), training within a sector (n=9), and developing a provincial policy (n=7) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Solutions to Barriers in Collaboration by Sectors (frequency)



For those respondents who identified resources as a solution to barriers in VAW and CAS collaboration, many felt intervention tools (n=15) followed by funding (n=10) was most needed (see Figure 14). In terms of training as a potential solution to barriers in collaboration, respondents suggested the following topics should be addressed in training: engaging abusive men (n=10), followed by the use of assessment tools (n=8), and gender-based analysis (n=4) (see Figure 15).

Figure 14: Resources Most Frequently Requested by Respondents (frequency)

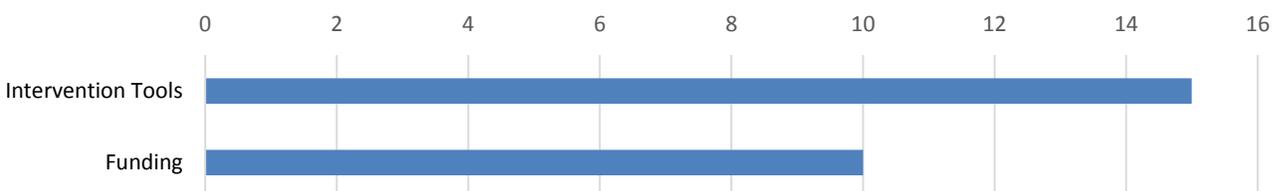
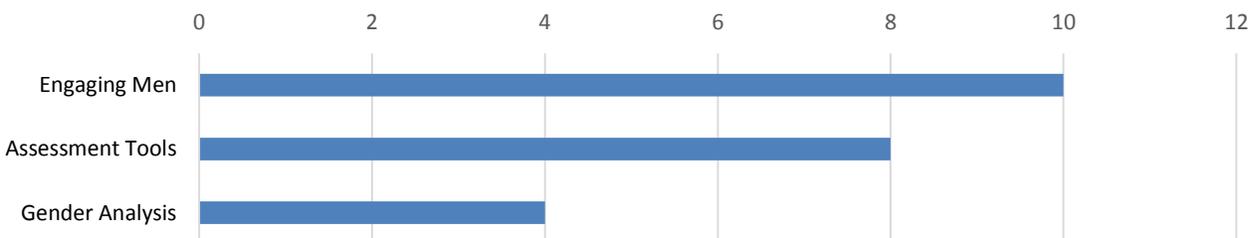


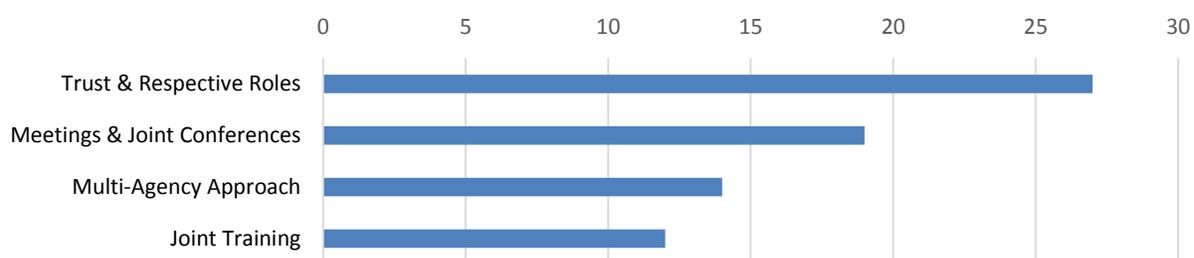
Figure 15: Respondents Most Requested Training Topics (frequency)



## Strategies/Promising Practices

Respondents were asked to identify VAW and CAS collaboration strategies/promising practices that have resulted in the greatest benefit for families. The majority of respondents identified having trusting relationships and an understanding of respective roles across sectors (n=27), followed by having cross-sector meetings and joint conferences (n=19), providing a multi-agency approach (n=14), and joint training (n=12) (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Most Beneficial Strategies to Collaboration as Identified by Respondents (frequency)



## Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of the perspectives of 70 professionals on VAW and CAS collaboration who attended the Learning Network Forum on September 19, 2013 -- *Keeping Children and Mothers Safe and Engaging Men who use Abusive Behaviours*.

Survey results reflect improvement in VAW and CAS collaboration in communities represented by the respondents. Results also indicate that substantial improvements are still required to promote safety on dimensions such as including a gender analysis, understanding risk and risk management strategies, and engaging men who use abusive behaviours. On some dimensions results were related to the respondents' sector (VAW vs. CAS) or their position within their organization (e.g., frontline vs. management).

Identified barriers to collaboration included limited resources, limited collaboration, insufficient training, limited information sharing between sectors, and fear and/or suspicions of the other sector's objectives and mandates.

According to respondents, the collaboration strategy that has most benefited families was developing trusting relationships and understanding respective VAW and CAS roles.

Proposed solutions for addressing barriers included: joint CAS and VAW training, training within a sector, resources, community cross-training and interagency protocol amendments. The resources most frequently requested were intervention tools and funding. The most frequently requested training topics were engaging men who use abusive behaviours and assessment tools.

This report will be shared with members of the Learning Network's Provincial Advisory Group, as well as representatives from the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Following this review the results will be made available on the Learning Network's website.