women. Structural violence draws our attention to the systemic social, economic, and historical factors that shape how Aboriginal people (and other ethnic groups) are treated. For example, the Indian Act and institutions such as residential schools have resulted in embedded racism and gender discrimination and a lack of access to economic and social resources for all Aboriginal people – especially women (Benoit et al., 2003; Browne et al., 2007). As a result, Aboriginal women are placed at increased risk of physical and sexual violence from within and outside their communities (Shannon et al., 2007a). Certainly the Aboriginal women who have been injured, gone missing, or been murdered in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, or on what has become known as the "Highway of Tears" – Highway 16 located in Northern British Columbia near Prince Rupert – are compelling examples of this kind of gendered and racial discrimination.

Compounding these kinds of problems is that Aboriginal women are more likely to live in rural areas or on r

less inclined to report violence for fear that they, or their sponsor, will be deported from Canada (Dunn & Dyck, 2000; Vissandjee et al., 2007). Refugee women may be even less likely to seek help from the authorities if they have come from a situation where they experienced state-sanctioned violence as doing so could jeopardize their refugee status (VIHA, 2007a). Undocumented or illegal immigrant women often work extremely long hours, endure difficult working conditions, and sometimes face sexual and emotional abuse. They too have little recourse but remain silent about abuse because of concerns that they will be deported back to their country of origin (Stasiulis & Bakan, 1997).

Prevalence of Sexual and Physical Violence

Research shows it is less expensive to fund early intervention programs for sexual and physical assault survivors than it is to fund long-term health care for victims after their abuse escalates to life-threatening levels (Ross and Morrow, 2003). Despite the evidence, in the last fifteen years neoliberal reforms across Canada have resulted in funding cuts to social welfare programs (Benoit & Hallgrimsdottir, 2008). Anti-violence programs, women's sexual assault centres, and transition houses have been cut back or eliminated altogether across BC and in most other Canadi

autonomy and independence place women in especially vulnerable situations as they are seen as "choosing" their situations and being personally responsible for "getting out" of violent relationships (Varcoe & Dick, 2008: 490). This misunderstanding follows a larger conservative trend whereby governments shift responsibility for health and social welfare onto the individual. By making individuals feel personally responsible for their own suffering they are consequently deflected from the structural circumstances that may be complicit (Shumka & Benoit, 2008). As a result, women with fewer resources or little social capital are left without the social and financial support networks that are needed in order to break free of abusive relationships and gain economic independence in order to care for themselves and their children (Morrow et al., 2004).

Opportunities for Social Action

While undoubtedly more research needs to be done to better understand the multiple interacting factors that are linked to the high levels of interpersonal violence experienced by women and girls, it is equally important to take action on what we *do* know. Following is a list of opportunities available to policy makers, government, and all concerned Canadians:

- Recognize that interpersonal violence against women is not just an individual concern but also the responsibility of society and its institutions.

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(McIvor & Nahanee, 1998). The WHRN is supporting research teams to help move this agenda along by encouraging collaboration between community and academic sectors and highlighting the need for an intersectional and gendered research lens to effectively address the complexity of violence and trauma experienced by women and girls.

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- Provincial association of service providers who address relationship violence, child abuse (recent or historical), and sexual assault.
- Members work in sexual assault centres, community-based victim assistance programs, stopping-the-violence counseling and outreach programs, and similar services.
- Develops policy, guidelines, training, resources, and conducts research and analysis.

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- Educational resources and information bulletins on treatment for men who use violence in relationships.
- Province-wide analysis of current service delivery systems of services for assaultive men and community models for increasing women's safety.

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- Aboriginal Health Program.
- Sexual Assault Services.
- Woman Abuse Response Program.

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- Resources for community-based services that support survivors of sexual assault, relationship violence, child abuse and criminal harassment.
- Creates essential links between these programs and government policy makers, legislators and other provincial organization.

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- Non-profit organization committed to "protecting the legal rights of older adults; increasing access to justice for older adults; informing the public about elder abuse; and providing supportive programs for older adults who have been abused".

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