



Ipsos Reid Public Affairs



# Alberta Children's Services: Albertans' Perceptions of Family Violence and Bullying Survey 2008

– Summary Report –

Submitted by:  
IPSOS REID PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
600 – 635 Eighth Avenue SW  
Calgary, AB T2P 3M3

March 2008

Alberta

## KEY FINDINGS

Ipsos Reid conducted a total of 1,571 telephone interviews with Albertans aged 16 years and older between January 14<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Data were weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/gender composition reflects that of the actual population of Albertans aged 16+ according to 2006 Census data.

The overall purpose of the research was to examine issues related to public understanding and awareness of bullying and family violence, measure exposure to the issues of bullying in family violence in the media and inform future directions for the public awareness and education campaigns in the prevention of family violence and bullying.

### BULLYING

#### Behaviours, Warning Signals and Prevention

**The majority of Albertans recognize a wide range of bullying behaviours, are generally well-equipped to identify a young person being bullied and would take appropriate actions if they had a young person in their household being bullied.**

- Verbal and physical behaviours among children and youth are the most recognized types of bullying; cyber bullying is not top-of-mind for most Albertans. When asked to think about the types of behaviours that characterize bullying among children and youth, seven-in-ten Albertans identify various forms of verbal abuse (69%) and physical behaviours (69%). Threatening someone – a form of verbal bullying – is specifically mentioned by 19% of respondents. Laughing at someone or exclusion (11%), cyber bullying (7%) and depriving someone of their possessions (3%) are mentioned by only a minority of Albertans.
- Withdrawal is the most recognized warning signal, followed by avoidance of activities or school, and sadness; many other physical and psychological consequences are also identified.
- The majority of Albertans would take appropriate actions if they had a young person in their household who was being bullied by others. Seven-in-ten respondents (70%) say they would talk to someone in charge of the environment where the bullying is taking place, 42% say they would talk to the parents of the person or people doing the bullying and 34% say they would try to talk to the young person being bullied to find out what is happening.

#### Attitudes Regarding Bullying and Bullying Prevention

**Albertans place extremely high priority on the prevention of bullying at the community level and, moreover, are willing to accept personal responsibility.**

- The vast majority of Albertans agree that bullying prevention should be an urgent priority of their community (91%) and that they have a personal responsibility to reduce bullying in their community (89%). More than four-in-five also agree bullying prevention should be an urgent priority at the provincial government level.

**Though a minority, it is concerning that one-quarter of Albertans (24%) agree that bullying is just a normal part of growing up.**

## FAMILY VIOLENCE

### Perceptions and Impacts

**Albertans have a broad understanding of behaviours that constitute family violence, are generally aware of the impacts of family violence and recognize the negative impacts on children.**

- There is near universal acknowledgement among Albertans that sexual abuse (99%), threatening or harming with a weapon (99%), kicking, biting or hitting a family member with a fist (98%), shaking a baby (97%) and hurting family pets (96%) are types of family violence. The one action that does not fall under the umbrella of family violence for many Albertans is preventing an adult family member from knowing about or having access to family income or savings – 65% consider it to be family violence.
- Negative psychological effects – including low self esteem or confidence and isolation or withdrawal – are the most frequently identified impacts of family violence.
- There is widespread agreement (98%) that children who see or hear family violence in their home are affected negatively, with fully two-thirds of Albertans (68%) saying they *strongly* agree. Over eight-in-ten (83%) also see the connection between family violence and bullying.

### Family Violence Prevalence

**In 2008, 59% of Albertans believe family violence occurs ‘a lot’ (13%) or ‘a fair bit’ (46%) in their own community – a significant 10 percentage point increase from 2005. Another 34% think it happens ‘not very often’ while just 2% think it does not happen at all.**

### Attitudes Regarding Family Violence

**Albertans clearly recognize family violence prevention as an urgent priority at both the community and provincial government levels, and accept personal responsibility. Prevention of family violence is considered to be a more urgent priority for the provincial government than bullying prevention, though both are deemed urgent priorities by most Albertans.**

- There is strong consensus that family violence prevention should be an urgent priority at the community level (94% agree) and that Albertans have a personal responsibility to reduce family violence in their communities (90% agree). Nine-in-ten (90%) also agree family violence prevention should be an urgent priority for the provincial government (higher than the 83% agreement with regard to bullying prevention).

**A marked gender distinction exists regarding the ability for men and women to leave an abusive relationship.**

- Albertans are split in their opinion regarding a woman’s ability to leave an abusive relationship – 45% agree that most women could leave if they wanted to while 54% disagree. When it comes to men, however, seven-in-ten Albertans (69%) agree that most men could leave an abusive relationship if they wanted to.

## Recommended Resources for Victims of Family Violence

**The police and community services would be the most frequently suggested channels for information or support regarding family violence.**

- If someone experiencing family violence asked them where to get information or where to go for support, one-half of Albertans (49%) would suggest the police while one-third (34%) would suggest community services. Telephone help lines (17%), a shelter (17%), a physician or health care provider (13%), clergy (12%) and victim services (12%) round out the top seven suggestions.

## Barriers to Helping in a Family Violence Situation

**On an unaided basis, fear of retaliation, repercussions or getting hurt is the biggest barrier to not helping in a family violence situation, followed by not wanting to get involved.**

- When asked to provide reasons why people do not always help when they are aware of a family violence situation, fear (46%) and not wanting to get involved (32%) are the most frequent responses, followed by people seeing it as none of their business (17%) and wanting to avoid the stress (13%). Only one-in-ten (11%) suggest people do not know how to help or are not aware of resources to help.

**When asked to assess five specific barriers, being unsure of exactly what action to take emerges as the strongest barrier – somewhat incongruous with top-of-mind responses.**

- Of the five reasons tested, the two biggest barriers to helping in a family violence situation are being unsure of exactly what action to take (79% say this happens ‘always’ or ‘often’) and feeling that it is a family matter and not their concern (77% say this happens ‘always’ or ‘often’). These are followed by people afraid of being harmed themselves (70% say this happens ‘always’ or ‘often’) and people being concerned that involving the authorities would make the situation worse (66% say this happens ‘always’ or ‘often’). Believing the situation to be an isolated incident is a less prominent barrier (58% say this happens ‘always’ or ‘often’). Still, virtually all Albertans think all five reasons are barriers to helping at least once in a while.

## MEDIA EXPOSURE

**Media exposure to the issues of bullying prevention and family violence prevention is high and the majority of Albertans exposed feel the information is useful.**

- 70% of Albertans recall reading, seeing or hearing information about the prevention of bullying in the past 12 months.
- In total, 83% of Albertans have been exposed to information regarding the prevention of family violence – either via the “Fight Circle” commercial or by exposure in other media.
- One-in-four Albertans (26%) recall hearing about a family violence information line in the past three months, while 14% recall hearing about a family violence website.
- 65% of Albertans who have seen information about the prevention of bullying or family violence feel they are now better able to help in a bullying or family violence situation.
- Television is the most prevalent source of information about family violence followed by newspapers.