



Item No. 3

Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality September 4, 2024

TO: Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 22, 2024

SUBJECT: Halifax Regional Police – Gender-Based Violence Information Report

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

February 28, 2022, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 11.2.4):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners invite subject matter experts in the areas of gender-based violence, family violence, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence (collectively, “gender-based violence”) to give presentations to the Board at a special consultation meeting.

THAT the Chair of the Board of the Police Commissioners direct the chief officer of the Halifax Regional Police to, ahead of the special consultation meeting, draft a staff report outlining policies, procedures, statistics and other relevant information relating to the issue of policing and gender-based violence.

THAT the Chair of the Board of the Police Commissioners advise the chief officer of the Halifax District RCMP to do the same.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

BACKGROUND

Canada’s national action plan to end gender-based violence¹ defines gender-based violence as violence against a person because of their sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. It is a human rights violation which either results or is likely to result in suffering and multiple types of harm.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence/first-national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html>

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls.

In February 2022, the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) for Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) directed Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to produce a staff report outlining policies, procedures, statistics, and other relevant information relating to the issue of policing and gender-based violence.

DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this report, HRP is providing information on the following crime types involving harm or the threat of harm, where women and girls are disproportionately affected – domestic violence, sexual violence and exploitation, human trafficking, and hate crimes and incidents where gender was the targeted characteristic.

Victim Services

It is worth noting at the outset of this report the substantial and important work carried out by HRP Victim Services in relation to all reports of crime where a victim is involved, including gender-based violence. The Victim Services team is staffed by highly trained and skilled employees and volunteers, who provide support to victims of crime, and particularly intimate partner violence and spousal abuse. The team includes the permanent positions of Domestic Violence Case Coordinator (DVCC) and Sexual Violence Caseworker, and a temporary position of Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON).

Victim Services attempts to contact all victims of crime within 48 hours of the incident, to provide emotional support, police case information, and to connect victims with other supports in the community, to provide them with the tools necessary to seek additional help and support. The team is connected with multiple community partners with different specialist areas, including the Chebucto Family Centre and the YWCA Gender-Based Violence Settlement Sector. All staff and volunteers are familiarized with the services offered by all partners through introductory meetings, professional visits, and ongoing communication, to assist their knowledge of existing and new programs and services offered by partners.

Victim Services staff and volunteers use a trauma-informed and victim-centred approach when working with victims of violence. They deliver training to officers on the use of a trauma-informed approach, with an emphasis on meeting victims where they are, and the importance of understanding that victims may present in a range of ways, such as being non-responsive or not remembering details. Interactive exercises are used in the training to emphasize the importance of understanding the range of responses a victim may have.

Victim Services also delivers ‘Safe Place – Safe Space’ workshops to external organizations. The workshops are designed for supervisors and HR departments and address safety planning in the workplace, with not only victims of domestic violence, but also with accused persons who have taken responsibility for the violence and need support and accommodation for court and counselling. The content of the workshops includes the importance of safety planning, accommodations for work schedules, and arrival and departure times, as well as provision of a safe place to disclose for both the victims and offenders.

Lastly, but very significantly, Victim Services also has a Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON) role. The DVON program started as a pilot project in 2019, and is an upstream primary resource to high-risk domestic violence offenders. Through early intervention, the DVON initiates conversations with the offender, with the shared objective of the offender taking responsibility, acknowledging the harm of their abuse, and accepting help.

The two highly trained and specialized roles of the DVON and the DVCC work closely together with the team’s Domestic Violence Officer (DVO) to share information and adopt a problem-solving approach, to ensure the safety of the victim and deliver support to the offender to mitigate the risk of further harm. For many offenders, who truly want to change and are struggling with the outcomes of their abuse, such as the

loss of their parenting role, it is the first time they have been offered help and support. Funding for the DVON role has recently been extended through a provincial grant, and a request to make the role permanent will be included in the HRP budget process for 2025/26.

The above is a summary of the relevant points in relation to gender-based violence and Victim Services, however the services they provide are extensive and reach far beyond this summary. Further information is available to the Board of Police Commissioners upon request. Information relating to Victim Services², domestic violence³, and sexual assault⁴, is also publicly available on the HRP section of the HRM website.

Domestic Violence

HRP has policies in the following areas:

- Domestic Violence Intervention Act (DVIA) – this legislation creates a system for granting orders to victims of domestic violence in an expedited manner;
- Emergency Protection Order (EPO) – the DVIA also permits the Justice of the Peace to grant an EPO to ensure the immediate protection of a victim;
- Domestic Violence Alarm Program (DVAP) – this is coordinated by the HRP Victim Services Unit as a means of providing security to high-risk victims of domestic violence;
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) – this policy outlines the responsibilities and processes involved in the response to an IPV incident, additional to the standard response and investigation.

Under the IPV policy, the HRP response includes that the incident is flagged as domestic violence on the HRP Records Management System (Versadex RMS), any child welfare referrals are completed, and the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) tool is completed⁵.

Nova Scotia has a pro-arrest, pro-charge policy regarding domestic violence, which means that where there is reasonable evidence that an offence took place, the investigating officer must lay charges. This removes the onus from victims, whereas previously it was not uncommon for them to feel fearful about pressing charges, or receive threats or intimidation from the abuser in an effort to prevent them from asking for charges.

Victim Services will be informed in all IPV cases and, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, may attend the scene. Where the risk assessment indicates a high risk of serious harm, the DVCC is utilized, to manage the file and coordinate information sharing among all primary service providers. Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the Integrated Criminal Investigation Division (ICID). Further detail on HRP processes can be found in the IPV policy at **Attachment 1**.

The following statistics outline the number of domestic violence files reported to HRP⁶ since 2018, broken down by charge and those which were designated high risk for serious harm. Files marked as 'critical development' are those originally designated as high risk and where a new incident has occurred, triggering the requirement for the high risk process of notification to all protocol partners, to be repeated.

² <https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/what-victim-services-unit>;
<https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/victim-services-team>

³ <https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/domestic-violence>

⁴ <https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/sexual-assault>;
<https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/sexual-assault-reporting-process>

⁵ All Nova Scotia police agencies are mandated to utilize this risk assessment tool

⁶ Where an HRP file is transferred to the integrated CID, which is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, it may be investigated by an RCMP member

Table 1 – Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police

Year	Charge files	No Charge files
2018	921	1472
2019	870	1548
2020	907	1438
2021	1175	906
2022	886	937
2023	903	1027
2024 (to June 30)	658	473

Table 2 – Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police and designated as high risk

Year	New High Risk Files	Critical Developments
2018	159	116
2019	191	121
2020	169	162
2021	213	189
2022	165	120
2023	190	161
2024 (to June 30)	42	28

Sexual Violence & Exploitation

HRP has a policy on Sexual Assault Investigations⁷, which outlines how sexual assault investigations are complex in nature and require a trauma-informed response (TIR). Where possible, officers trained in TIR will be dispatched to these reports. The policy also outlines the specific actions required of call-takers, dispatchers, responding members, supervisors, the integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT) within the ICID, and other specialist positions when dealing with reports of sexual offences. The SAIT is staffed by detectives who have received specialist training in the areas of sexual violence and child abuse.

Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the SAIT. These include files where the victim is younger than 16, the investigation is historical in nature, or unusually complex.

The following statistics outline reports of sexual violence and exploitation reported to HRP since 2019⁸.

⁷ This policy is currently under review and therefore is not publicly available, however it can be made available to members of the BoPC upon request

⁸ Where an HRP file is investigated by the integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT), which is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, it may be investigated by an RCMP member

Table 3 – Total files involving sexual violence and/or exploitation reported to Halifax Regional Police

Year	Sexual Violence & Exploitation Files
2019	306
2020	236
2021	315
2022	325
2023	300
2024 YTD (to July 31)	155

Human Trafficking

HRP has a policy on Human Trafficking and Missing Persons (HTMP)⁹, and investigations into these types of incidents are conducted by the integrated HTMP unit in the ICID. The HTMP unit is made up of detectives who have received specialist training in the areas of human trafficking and missing persons.

Incidents where human trafficking may be present are rarely reported at the outset as ‘human trafficking’, they will often be received as a different type of call for service, such as assault, or domestic violence. Where the investigation reveals a broader picture and police may identify or suspect that human trafficking is occurring, the investigation will transfer to the HTMP unit¹⁰.

The HTMP policy outlines the indicators of human trafficking, some of the complex factors to be recognized and considered in these investigations, the importance of a trauma-informed response, and the actions required of responding members, supervisors, and other specialist positions when dealing with suspected human trafficking.

Human trafficking offences in Canada are addressed by the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC), and also the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). The CCC addresses trafficking within Canada, and the IRPA addresses trafficking into Canada from another country.

The following statistics outline the CCC and IRPA offences recorded as occurring within HRP areas¹¹.

Table 4 - Total files involving human trafficking investigations recorded by HRP

Year	CCC	IRPA	Total
2019	11	14	25
2020	15	13	28
2021	27	1	28
2022	17	0	17
2023	12	11	23
2024 YTD (to July 31)	4	14	18

⁹ This policy is currently under review and therefore is not publicly available, however it can be made available to members of the BoPC upon request

¹⁰ Where the integrated HTMP is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, the file may be investigated by an RCMP member

¹¹ Where available, the primary location will be recorded. The geographical span and complexity of human trafficking investigations means identifying a primary location is not always possible

Hate Crimes and Incidents

HRP has a policy on Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents¹², which outlines the additional responsibilities and expectations required when responding to a report where hate is suspected to be a motivating factor. These include that any such reports will be flagged as hate-motivated on the Versadex RMS, and referred to the HRP Hate Crime Unit (HCU) for review.

The HCU is currently staffed by one detective who has received specialist training in the area of hate crime and violent extremism, and is due to expand to two positions after an additional investigator position was approved in the 2024/25 budget process.

Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the ICID. The HCU will assist with the hate-motivated aspects of any investigation as appropriate and, where charges are laid, shall work with the investigating officer and the prosecutor to ensure the hate motivation is raised as an aggravating factor at court.

As part of HRP's progress in responding to hate crimes and hate incidents, the HCU was implemented in January 2022 and there has been a focus on improved data collection. The following statistics outline the number of hate crimes and hate incidents where gender identity and/or expression was the targeted characteristic, including those classified as misogynistic and transphobic.

Table 5 - Total files involving confirmed or suspected hate motivation reported to Halifax Regional Police, where gender identity or expression was the targeted characteristic

Year	Hate Crimes	Hate Incidents ¹³
2022	5	2
2023	10	38
2024 YTD (to July 31)	5	16

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this information report.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under subsection 55(1) of the Police Act, the function of a board is to provide:

- (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and
- (b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department

¹² <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/fire-police/police/hate-crime-and-hate-incident-response.pdf>

¹³ Hate Incidents are hate-motivated behaviours which are not criminal acts

Without limiting the generality of the functions noted in subsection 55(1), under subsection 55(3) the Board has the following specific duties: ...

- (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
- (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
- (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers.

Section 52 reads:

On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair’s delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Intimate Partner Violence Policy, Halifax Regional Police.

Report Prepared by: Acting Deputy Chief Andrew Matthews – Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Halifax Regional Police
