

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

NWT FAMILY VIOLENCE SURVEY

June 13, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, family violence has claimed yet another victim in the Northwest Territories. May Elanik of Aklavik was the mother of seven, including four girls, ranging in age from four to 13. She died in November after being found injured and unconscious outdoors. Last month a family member was charged with her death. He had been sentenced to house arrest earlier this year for assaulting May. This pattern of abuse escalating to homicide is far too common here in the NWT.

The Mandate for the 18th Assembly calls on us to take action on the crisis of family and community violence. It is also one of three priorities of the Standing Committee on Social Development. Family violence is a crisis because it occurs in the NWT at nine times the national average. The rate has been high for many years and has resisted efforts by the Family Violence Coalition and the GNWT to reduce it.

A first step is to ensure we have a common understanding of what family violence is. The NWT Bureau of Statistics surveyed 753 people in communities large and small in November 2007 to answer this question. The good news is that 88 per cent of respondents said they were either very worried or somewhat worried about family violence. But the detailed findings are revealing.

An important finding is that a quarter of men and 16 per cent of women still believe that physical violence between a couple is a private matter to be resolved within the family. Women are more likely than men to state that pushing, grabbing or shoving a family member constituted family violence. There's a general reluctance to define family violence as a problem for which help is needed. And finally, there is also a considerable misunderstanding that men are victims of family violence to the same extent as women. They are not.

The reason I'm bringing this survey to light today is because I think it's time to do it again. In the ten years since it was last done, the government has invested thousands of dollars in campaigns aimed at prevention but the rate hasn't budged. What will it take to make people safe in their homes, free from abuse by their loved ones?

I believe that updating the family violence survey will give us the information we need to create an effective action plan, one that is aimed at the attitudes that perpetuate family violence.

It's time for us to strengthen the prevention of family violence, to work in a smart and consistent way to ensure every NWT resident hears the message that violence is not inevitable and it is preventable. We have to do this work for ourselves and for our children. My simple hope is that May's daughters will be safe in their home along with women everywhere. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.