



Featured Initiative

Established in 2020, the CACP/Motorola Solutions Community Safety & Well-Being Award (CSWB) was created to recognize outstanding effort and contributions to improving community safety and well-being in Canada through the process of inter- or multi-sector partnership, community mobilization, shared issue/problem ownership, shared outcomes and shared measurement. Many deserving submissions are received and the CACP wishes to share initiatives that could be implemented and/or be adopted by other police services. Here is one such initiative.

THE GEOLOCATION PROJECT: HIGH RISKS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Sûreté du Québec

Recipient of the 2021 CACP/Motorola Solutions Community Safety & Well-Being Award

The problem to be solved / The need to be met

Domestic violence (psychological, verbal, physical, sexual and economic) represents approximately one third of all crimes committed against a person in the province of Quebec on an annual basis (MSP, 2015). Although the means of control chosen to dominate another person and assert power over them have always been diverse, the arrival of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have completely changed the reality for victims of domestic violence.

Geolocation may be harmless for most Canadians, but when it comes to domestic violence, it represents a threat to the safety of victims, their children, shelter workers, and other families living in shelters. For them, geolocation is used as a particularly effective control and harassment tool by their aggressor.

In the past, the aggressor had to use more 'energy-intensive' means to spy on a victim. Today, it is possible to track victims at a distance, from the comfort of their own home. In fact, ICTs are now the preferred means of criminal harassment by abusers (Bernier, 2016). Physical distancing is no longer a means of ensuring the safety of a victim of domestic violence because the geolocation function can allow an abuser to know the exact location where victims have sought shelter.

All cell phones are equipped with GPS location systems that were initially activated (Bernier, 2016). Social networks allow geolocation through private messages or by publishing photos. As a result, ensuring anonymity is now a very complex task. Some perpetrators of cyberstalking also install spyware in electronic devices, which plays on the victim's fear since they never know if their attacker is likely to appear. Geolocation has provided abusers with a new means of control that can continue, and even increase, after a separation or break-up.

Shutting down a device or disconnecting victims from their social networks is not an ideal solution. When victims arrive at a shelter, they feel very isolated and experience a period of intense stress. Disconnecting them from their loved ones at this stage is obviously not helpful. Children must also be educated since they are 'connected' at all times.

Partners

The Sûreté du Québec established an advisory committee involving government partners, police agencies, as well as domestic violence victim support agencies. The committee consisted of representatives from the Quebec Department of Justice and Quebec Department of Public Safety, from the Montreal Police Service, SOS violence conjugale, the Regroupement des maisons d'hébergement, the Federation of women's shelters, the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF), the Alliance des maisons de 2^e étape, as well as the Sûreté du Québec's victim assistance unit and cybercrime investigation division. The creation of this committee allowed the group to better understand the reality of victims of domestic violence and the extent to which geolocation was a life-threatening feature.

The Solution

The advisory committee worked together to produce prevention and awareness tools intended for police services, women's shelter workers, and victims of domestic violence. The materials are meant to address the dangers of geolocation through cell phone technology and social media with a goal to ensure the safety of all parties involved.

The Geolocation Project stems from Quebec's [Government Action Plan on Domestic Violence 2018-2023](#) and adopts an approach centered on the cornerstones of community-based policing. It has provided the police with tools to explain the safety measures to be taken to avoid being geolocated, the methods to store and collect electronic evidence, as well as steps to be taken if victims wish to file a complaint.

Objectives

The Geolocation project is focused on prevention and is intended to allow responders to act upstream and protect victims of domestic violence. Three key objectives were identified for this initiative:

1. Educate victims of domestic violence on the safety issues related to the use of mobile devices to help prevent remote control by a partner or ex-partner.
2. Provide shelter workers and police officers with tools to manage domestic abuse situations where the safety of the victim is compromised.
3. Inform police officers on the issue of domestic violence and on best practices for effective interventions with victims of domestic violence.

Planning

The following steps were completed:

1. Discussions with Quebec's Department of Public Safety.
2. The identification of, and outreach to, **internal and external partners** to create an advisory committee.
3. The completion of a **literature review** to compile the list of recent projects that had or were being carried out by partners regarding domestic violence.
4. The **development of tools** focused on four key topics:
 - a. Informing victims of domestic violence about what geolocation features are, what the associated risks are, and how best to ensure their safety
 - b. Collecting electronic evidence
 - c. Reporting a complaint to the police
 - d. Best practices for police intervention

Implementation

Tools and initiatives were adapted to meet the needs of three key target audiences — victims of domestic violence, shelter workers, and police officers. The tools were developed during five (5) advisory committee meetings and a number of online exchanges. The implementation plan consisted of three key steps:

1. The content development, translation into 16 languages, and production of tools.
2. The distribution of materials to partner organizations via the Sûreté du Québec in police services, Quebec courthouses, and Quebec women's shelters.
3. The planning and implementation of a workshop to be delivered at the Séminaire Intersection 2019 (conference).

Marketing and Communications

All partner organizations maximized their respective communication networks to promote the project and its resources.

- Women's shelters distributed more than 9,500 tools throughout the province.
- SOS violence conjugale distributed materials to more than 500 Cégep Saint-Laurent students as part of their *C'est pas violent* public awareness campaign in November 2019.
- SOS violence conjugale and the Sûreté du Québec jointly facilitated four workshops at the Séminaire Intersection 2019 conference where they also distributed over 3,000 awareness documents.
- Municipal and First Nations police services in the province of Quebec ordered over 20,000 copies of the new awareness resources and over 50,000 documents were sent to the four Sûreté du Québec district offices.
- A presentation was delivered to the Office of the Chief Firearms Officer of Quebec.
- The Quebec Department of Justice distributed materials via all Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVAC).

Financial, Human and Material Resources

- The costs associated with this initiative were assumed by the Sûreté du Québec and Quebec's Secrétariat à la condition féminine (Secretariat for the Status of Women) as part of Quebec's *Government Action Plan on Domestic Violence 2018-2023*.
- The content development and marketing of the new tools were done in a collaborative manner involving all members of the advisory committee.

Program evaluation

The Geolocation Project stands out in the following ways:

- It targets other clientele that were not being served by existing tools — victims and police officers.
- It includes several different tools: poster, leaflet, multilingual materials, tip sheets, a guide, etc. available in print and electronic formats.
- The multilingual materials exist in 16 languages, including several First Nations languages.
- The materials are available in large print for the visually impaired.

An assessment of the Geolocation Project is being achieved through:

- Séminaire Intersection 2019 conference workshop evaluation forms and onsite verbal feedback.
- Interviews with shelter workers and police officers.
- The number of tools distributed and the reach of these tools.

Impacts of the program

1. Impact on victims:

- Over 7,000 tools have been shared in women's shelters, reaching over 10,000 women and children.
- Increased sense of safety for victims due to the reduced ability for an abuser to "stalk" their victim(s).

2. Impact on shelter workers:

- 112 of 144 first and second stage housing establishments in Quebec now use the new materials on a daily basis.
- SOS violence conjugale staff who only have contact with their clients by phone or social networks felt better informed and equipped to assist victims via the availability of electronic materials in multilingual formats.

3. Impact on police officers:

- Increased confidence in assisting and supporting victims of domestic violence in a process that is extremely challenging.
- Increased collaboration with citizens due to the preventive facet of the program, thereby creating a bond of trust between the community and police services.

To learn more

If your agency is interested in learning more and wishes to explore the possibility of implementing a similar initiative in your community, you are invited to contact:

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