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wife abuse a male use
of power, delegates told

Barbara Pressman, social worker in residence at Wilfrid Laurier University, told the 450 delegates at an international conference on family violence at Laurier Friday, that no problem facing social workers embodies power more than wife abuse.

Pressman said the existing social structures afford privilege and status for men and disenfranchisement for women who too often are seen as masochistic, passive and envious of the male genital organ.

"These Freudian views of women resist modification," Pressman said. "Consequently, those embracing a traditional therapeutic orientation misinterpret women's behaviour, misdiagnose and mistreat."

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She said many therapists impose myths about women on their clients that subtly endorse and promote beliefs about women as being intrinsically flawed and inferior-- views which become political because they justify the existing social structure.

"I am not suggesting for one second this political act is conscious," she said. "These values regarding women are so ingrained that they are not even thought about or questioned.

"I am further suggesting that neutrality in therapy is a myth and am urging, therefore, that we become conscious of our values in order that what we convey in therapy does not empower one group of people at the expense of another.

"And I want to make it clear that in becoming sensitive to the way therapy has tended to discredit, blame and denigrate women while exalting men, I am not advocating hostility toward men. What I am advocating is equality for men and women both in therapy and in society at large."

John Sweeney, minister of community and social services in the Ontario government, told the delegates that "assault is assault is assault," and the government is urging police officers to lay charges against husbands in domestic cases and not force women to lay charges against their spouses.

In another keynote talk, James Garbarino of Chicago, said public awareness of child abuse may be helping to reduce its occurrence.

Garbarino, president of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development, said a survey done in 1985 in the U.S. showed a 47 per cent decline in child abuse over a similar survey 10 years earlier.

He said one reason for the decline may be the greater public awareness and general condemnation of child abuse since ideas of right and wrong have an influence on individual behavior.