

Women starved, confined and severely beaten as domestic violence increased locally during pandemic lockdown

By **Pamela Vanmeer** - November 25, 2020



Photo by Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

KAWARTHA LAKES—"Often the women were severely beaten, so much they needed medical attention. There were some who had been confined, starved and deprived of the necessities of life." Carolyn Fox, Fund Development Coordinator at Women's Resources in Lindsay told Kawartha 411 News.

The pandemic has been hard for many people but for some local women it's been dangerous. Fox says during the initial pandemic lockdown in March the phones stopped ringing and there was an eerie silence.

"The numbers dropped significantly because women had no opportunity to reach out. The eerie silence, especially during lockdown, was no phone's ringing, hardly anyone calling." Fox explained. "The women were trapped in their own homes, unable to use a phone, computer or leave without their abusers catching them."

Women's Resources of Kawartha Lakes, is a not-for-profit, charitable organization created and run by local women. Women's Resources provides programs throughout the City of Kawartha Lakes to ensure that abused women and their children can get the help they need to lead lives free of abuse and violence.

Kawartha Lakes Police say domestic violence calls increased by approximately 20% during the first part of the lockdown. From January 1st, 2020 to March 20th, 2020, there were 131 domestic occurrences. From March 20th, 2020 to June 30th, 2020, there were 154 domestic occurrences according to police. They expect calls to continue to go up once the restrictions are lifted.

"During the pandemic our domestic calls were down at the beginning, then an increase in child

custody disputes." Domestic Violence Coordinator, Detective Constable Amy Farr told Kawartha 411 news. "The lower reporting is likely due to victims not being able to report because they are isolated with their abuser. I am expecting an increase once the social distancing restrictions are lifted."

Experts say gender-based violence in Canada during the lockdown was more severe and more frequent according to a national survey of those who worked with domestic violence and sexual assault survivors during the pandemic.

The survey included 376 staff and volunteers working at shelters, social service agencies, transition houses and other groups in the gender based violence (GBV) sector.

Almost half of those surveyed said they noticed changes in the severity and prevalence of violence, with 82 per cent saying the violence increased and got more frequent. More than a third say they noticed changes in the mental health and well being of their clients. A fifth said abusers' violent tactics changed and control over their victims increased, including a sharp increase in cases of strangulation, the survey found.

The survey was conducted by Ending Violence Association of Canada and a company called Anova, from May 18 to July 20, 2020.

Those surveyed said abusers took advantage of the conditions created by the pandemic to increase control over their victims, using isolation at home to ramp up violence, exert control, or by monitoring and controlling access to technology in order to limit the amount of help a victim was able to access.

"When women did come into our shelter it was usually via the police who were called by neighbours because they heard violent and noisy altercations." Fox says. "Often the women were severely beaten, so much they needed medical attention. Physical violence was most prevalent and we also saw some human-trafficking victims."

Fox says in other situations it was families that were forced to live together – mothers and daughters or sons, who didn't get along which also resulted in noisy, violent altercations.

"Women's Resources was even a part of these types of situations if the police chose to bring them in." Fox explains.

When lockdown lifted, the calls began to increase with women looking for understanding of their legal rights, child custody, and what it might look like if they left.

"Our Family Court Support Worker is very busy and tries to help the women make sense of our legal system. A recent stat heard on the radio was the divorce rates in Canada are up 40%. Not surprising." Fox says.

Experts say women in Canada are at greater risk of domestic violence and are more likely than men to experience intimate partner violence. According to 2018 police-reported data, women accounted for almost 8 in 10 victims (79%) of intimate partner violence. In Canada, women also account for the vast majority of victims of intimate partner homicides. According to police-reported data, women accounted for close to 8 in 10 victims (77%) of intimate partner homicides committed in 2018 in Canada. Women in Canada are more likely than men to be sexually assaulted. Between 2009 and 2014, the vast majority (87%) of police-reported sexual assault victims were women or girls, most of whom (70%) were under the age of 25.

Kawartha Lakes Police say their officers are aware of the increased risks that victims of crime are facing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“When a member of our police service attends a residence for a seemingly “routine” call for service, such as a noise complaint or other matter, they are on alert that a person involved may be giving subtle signs to the officer that they are in danger and needing assistance.” Sergeant Dave Murtha told Kawartha 411 News. “We also closely monitor our social media platforms, (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) for messages from a person who may be the victim of violence, but who is unable to pick up a telephone and call for help. In some instances, it is safer for a victim to send a “quiet” request for help through social media, rather than dial “911.”

According to Mutha the Kawartha Lakes Police Service has adjusted how they operate throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure they are still able to protect everyone in our community.

Experts say the pandemic has had a two fold impact on the victims of domestic violence. Not only are women at greater risk but the resources they rely on are cash strapped.

“It looks like our fundraising losses due to the loss of our special events may be approximately \$50,000 between now and March 31, 2021 which is the end of our fiscal year.” Fox explained.

They are holding a cash raffle this year instead of their annual Dream Ball in order to raise money. 1st Prize is \$5,000, 2nd is \$1,000 and 3rd is a Chromebook. Tickets are on sale now for \$10 each or 3 for \$20. They are available at WR at 22 Russell Street East or Vicky’s Values, 50 Mary Street West in Lindsay.

Click here for more information or to donate: <https://womensresources.ca/give/>

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Pamela VanMeer is a two time winner of the prestigious Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) Award. Her investigative reports on abuse in Long Term Care Homes garnered international attention for the issue and won the Ron Laidlaw Award. She is a former reporter and anchor at CHEX News, now Global Peterborough and helped launch the New CHEX Daily, a daily half hour talk show. While at CHCH News in Hamilton she covered some of the biggest news stories of the day.