

Community

Wife assault

A serious and violent social problem

"One of the greatest barriers to women's equality is the continuing threat of violence - and society's continuing tolerance of this violence," said Anne Swarbrick, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues for Ontario.

And one of the most serious forms of violence against women is wife assault.

WHAT IS WIFE ASSAULT?

Wife assault involves the use of threat or force by a man to intimidate his partner. The purpose of the assault is to control her behavior by creating fear.

Wife assault is more than physical assault. It encompasses a wide range of behavior, including sexual, psychological and emotional abuse.

Many people, mistakenly believe that wife assault is simply the result of an argument that got out of hand. In fact, wife assault is a serious and violent crime which results in physical injuries, psychological and emotional trauma, and even death.

MYTHS ABOUT WIFE ASSAULT

The wife assault campaign, has to date, laid important ground work in drawing attention to behavior that was previously hidden and not generally acknowledged. Ontario Women's Directorate research suggests public perception of wife assault is shifting. An increasing number of people now realize it is more than just family or private business: it is a serious public and criminal matter.

However, despite this growing awareness, there is still much to accomplish to reduce the incidence of domestic violence against women. Many people continue to believe the myths connected with wife assault. One of the most common of these myths is that women provoke and even enjoy violence.

Another common myth is that women would leave their abusive partners if they were truly unhappy about being abused.

In reality, violence has no connection with a woman's behavior or personality. According to counsellors of abusive men, provocation is an excuse offenders use to avoid responsibility for their own behavior.

Furthermore, assault victims remain in abusive relationships for many reasons. Poverty is a real possibility for assaulted women who leave their partners. Assaulted women are often also threatened by their husbands who say they will attempt to hurt or kill them if they leave. And if an abusive man sometimes shows kindness and affection to a partner, she may stay in the relationship, hoping the abuse will end.

FACTS ABOUT WIFE ASSAULT

The facts remain that:
- Wife assault is often a silent and hidden crime. Current statistics indicate that in Canada today at least one in eight women is assaulted by her male partner. This may be a conservative estimate since research suggests many assaults go unreported.

- Wife assault is a violent crime. It can start out with slapping, punching, kicking, shoving, choking or pinching, and escalate to violence involving the

use of weapons which may cause serious and permanent injury.

- Wife assault can result in death. Fifty-seven per cent of female homicides in this country are the result of domestic violence.

- Children of assaulted women also suffer harmful consequences. First, they are themselves at risk of being assaulted. They may also develop physical complaints, social adjustment problems, difficulties with school, sleep disturbances and other symptoms.

- Wife assault is a crime which affects all members of society. It occurs in families from every geographical, economic, cultural and educational background.

WHY MEN ASSAULT

It is not clearly understood why some men assault their wives and others do not. Practitioners in the field of wife abuse prevention have, however, reached a consensus on some of the factors that contribute to a man's use of violence against his wife.

Men who assault their partners choose to do so because they want to exert control and dominance. While assaulters blame their abusive behavior on many factors - alcohol, drugs, economic stresses - these men do not generally assault other men, their bosses, their neighbours or strangers on the street. But as long as a power imbalance exists

in relationships between men and women, domestic violence against women will continue to occur.

In addition, most violent men continue to assault their wives because no one forces them to stop. In a society where aggressive behavior is highly evident and often accepted as normal, there is considerable tolerance shown for men who use physical force against their wives. The result is that society often appears to condone offenders' behavior by its unwillingness to take their violence seriously.

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SOCIETY'S RESPONSIBILITY
The bottom line is that no woman deserves to be assaulted. Men who assault their partners must be held accountable for their actions. Society too often looks the other way when confronted with this issue. It is time for all of us to take responsibility for stopping the violence. Wife assault is a crime for which there is no excuse.

For further information call Adrian Mann, Communications Coordinator, (416) 597-4603.

Harbourfront invitation

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, Harbourfront invites you to enjoy an afternoon of seasonal storytelling. Festive Tales takes you on a magical journey around the world, featuring traditional festive tales from medieval England, Italy, China, Haiti and Canada.

Part history, part literature, part theatre, the oral tradition of storytelling is an integral aspect of many cultures. Through its use of folktales and legends, voice and language, storytelling is a unique way for the listener to experience other cultures.

Mariella Bertelli will tell festive tales based on Italian folktales and legends. Joan Badger has been telling stories for 40 years and will recount festival tales from medieval England.

Festive Tales will be told on Sunday, December 16 at 2 p.m. in the Brigantine Room, York Quay Centre, 235 Queens Quay West. For more information call 973-3000.

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