

Police taught grim reality of female assault

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Wife assault is any abuse a man directs against his female partner in an attempt to control or intimidate her, police officers learned during a seminar on domestic violence at the Halton Regional Police station in Georgetown, Nov. 12.

"You need to understand that in domestic assaults, there's the underlying issue of power and control," Acting Sergeant Brenda Glass told the group of 12 officers taking the day-long seminar. "The men are trying to control their female partners."

The seminar was one of many the Halton Regional Police service is presenting to train their officers on how to best respond to the needs of family violence victims.

They began in November, which is designated 'Wife Assault Awareness Month', and by February over 350 officers will receive the training which includes topics on sexual assault, ethno-cultural issues, wife assault and the effects on children.

"There are many explanations for spousal abuse...but absolutely no excuses."
Halton Family Services.

Act. Sgt. Glass said the seminars are vitally important because "a lot of officers hadn't heard about this before. Some officers don't have a full understanding of all the issues involved which comes from a lack of training."

She revealed it wasn't until last year that domestic abuse training was given to new recruits.

Part of the reason police are so behind in offering training, which concentrates on aiding the abuse victim, is because police were never required, under law, to assist the victim of crime.

That only changed in January 1991 when the revised Police Services Act declared, an officer is required "to assist the victim of crime," under law.

In assisting the victim, there are four things the victim needs to know: she needs to know assault is against the law, she needs to know she is believed, she needs to know she isn't the first person this has happened to and if she's an im-

migrant woman, she needs to know she won't be deported, said Act. Sgt. Glass.

Officers were also told the offender needs to hear that police are laying the charges, not his wife (partner) and that the wife cannot

withdraw the charges. Only the crown attorney can withdraw assault charges.

One statistic which surprised the group was that a woman will have been assaulted up to 35 times before she calls police.

"Why don't they just leave?" one officer asked.

"It's just not that easy," said Leanne Ansell, a police officer and member of the Halton Womens Place, a shelter for abused women and their children.

She had a list of 13 reasons why it is a much deeper issue than just leaving the home which included:

"Abuse can start with a slap and end with murder," say the Ontario Women's Directorate.

loss of financial security, nowhere else to go, love for husband despite abuse, strong family belief, low self-esteem, belief husband will change, fear of retaliation, belief abuse is normal behavior if learned in family home and embarrassment, to name a few.

Often the woman wants the family to stay together and by laying an assault charge, police can help the family heal, since often, a charge will make the violence stop, police were told.

"Just by laying a charge, we're taking the power and control away from the assaulter," said Act. Sgt. Glass. "Going to court undermines their power."

Police were told on every occasion, where there is reasonable and probable ground, a charge should be laid if there is an assault complaint made.

"It's our duty to take the information and lay a charge," said Act. Sgt. Glass.

"Research has shown a woman is assaulted up to 35 times before she calls police," said Act. Sgt. Brenda Glass.

Officers are also to follow spousal assault guidelines set up by the Ministry of the Solicitor-General which require police to: interview the victim and suspect separately; get victims to sign any statement she has provided to police and if an interpreter is required, an interpreter should be provided by someone other than the suspect.



Graphic by Ontario Women's Directorate

It can and does, happen here

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

An enraged man forcibly drags his girlfriend from her friend's house and keeps her captive in his car for two hours, beating her continuously. She finally escapes by leaping from the moving vehicle and gets picked up by a truck-driver who takes her to a local hospital where she's treated for multiple facial and internal injuries and severe bruising.

Another abuse case in Toronto you say? Think again. The suspect was a Georgetown man and the incident occurred this spring.

Reports of assault come in regularly at the Halton Regional Police Station in Georgetown. Most are investigated by North Halton's Family Violence Coordinator Sergeant Bob Andrews and his part-time partner, Detective-Constable Janice LaRose.

"There's been a substantial increase in sexual and physical assault," he said. "We've investigated 105 reports in North Halton to date."

He said he and Det. Const. LaRose's plate is full dealing with assault cases and admits there's a backlog. Besides assault cases, he is also responsible for coordinating fraud and missing persons cases.

Halton wide statistics prove assaults on females and assaults in general are on the rise.

In all of 1990, 271 spousal assault charges were laid. This year up to September, they've laid 281 charges. Of those charges, 239 were laid against men in 1990 and 268 against men in 1991.

Comparatively, only 33 women were charged with spousal assault in 1990 and 13 in 1991. In 29 of the cases in 1990, weapons were involved. Weapons were involved in 25 cases this year.

substantial increase in physical and sexual abuse in North Halton," said Sgt. Bob Andrews.



Sgt. Bob Andrews

Statistics on domestic assaults reveal in 1990, there were 37 in North Halton compared to 36 in 1991 from January-July. These figures don't include sexual assaults.

"We should be concerned about the frequency of assaults," said Acting Sergeant Brenda Glass, the representative police officer on the Halton Rape Crisis Centre Board of Directors.

"One in eight women are now assaulted in Canada. That figure used to be one in 10."

The situation has gotten so bad, the Crown Attorneys office in Halton has hired a spousal assault specialist who will prosecute most spousal assault cases and is also available to answer concerns and inquiries about this type of prosecution.

The Crown Attorneys office also has a special person to deal with victims of child abuse and sexual assault. This person meets with victims prior to their court appearance to help them feel more at ease with their involvement in the criminal court process.

It's all part of an extensive network designed to aid the victims of abuse and punish the abusers.



Targeting assault

Acting Sergeant Brenda Glass of the Halton Regional Police Service, hosted a seminar on assault for police officers Nov. 12 in Georgetown where police learned how to better deal with victims of assault. (Herald Photo)

Victim life-lines

- Halton Rape Crisis Centre: 875-1555
- Halton Sexual Abuse Program: 825-3242
- Halton Womens Place, Crisis: 878-8555
- North Halton Distress Centre: 877-1211
- Victim Services, Police: 877-9987
- Halton Multi-Cultural Council: 842-2486
- Halton Family Services: 845-3811
- Halton Crown Attorney: 878-7291
- CHOR Family Services: 637-5256
- Childrens Aid Society: 844-8211