

September 17th, 2005

Will Tomorrow be Better?

The topic for our September 17th Standing Committee meeting is violence against women. We need an update on this issue. It is something that continues to haunt us, both at home and internationally. We will be focusing on the subject "in our own backyard", with speakers from METRAC, Amnesty International and a local police force. Here is some information for your consideration in preparation for the meeting.

Since the end of World War II, egalitarian principles and the recognition of the universality of human rights have been the touchstone of international law. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and other international law instruments are premised on the right to equality. Women's equality has been proclaimed numerous times, and many instruments have set out principles and specific mechanisms to give it practical effect, including the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* and the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*.

In Canada, formal recognition of women's equality rights was achieved in 1982 with the adoption of the *Charter* and more particularly with the inclusion of ss: 15 and 28, which provide equality rights for women and other historically disadvantaged groups. The introduction of the *Charter* has fundamentally altered Canadian law, since the primacy attributed to egalitarian values marks a break with the colonialist, pro-slavery, and patriarchal heritage of the common law and the civil law. By making equality a fundamental value in the Canadian Constitution, the constitutional reform initiated a radical rejection of a system of rights based on domination and subordination.

National Association of Women and the Law

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The physical and sexual abuse of girls and women costs the Canadian economy \$4.2 billion dollars each year, factoring into account social services, criminal justice, lost employment days, and health care interventions. Nearly 90% of the financial cost is borne by government through our tax dollars.

Children who witness violence against their mothers are significantly more likely to develop aggressive behaviour (bullying, fighting) emotional disturbances (depression, continual fear, anxiety), criminal activity (destroying property, theft and vandalism) and experience negative effects on social and academic development. The majority of inmates in federal prisons with some history of committing violence against family members witnessed violence as children.

Immediate consequences for women

- Death: Worldwide, an estimated 40% to over 70% of homicides of women are committed by intimate partners, often in the context of an abusive relationship. Only a small proportion of men who are murdered are killed by

their female partners, and in such cases the women usually are defending themselves or retaliating against abusive men.

- Injury/permanent disability: Violence is a major cause of injury to women, ranging from cuts and bruises to permanent disability and death. In Canada 43% of women injured by their partners had to receive medical care, and 50% of those injured had to take time off from work.

- Unwanted pregnancy/abortion.

- Sexually-transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS.

- Emotional trauma.

Long-term consequences for women

Women who have experienced physical or sexual abuse, as children or adults, are at greater risk of health problems, such as injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, anxiety and clinical depression. Violence also undermines health by increasing self-destructive behaviors, such as smoking and substance abuse. The influence of abuse can persist long after the abuse has stopped. Over their lifetimes, survivors of abuse average more surgeries, physician and pharmacy visits, hospital stays, and mental health consultations than other women, even after accounting for other factors affecting health care use, and discounting emergency room visits. Also, women who have been sexually assaulted and/or battered are significantly more likely than other women to commit suicide.

Political will

Over the past twenty years, governments have commissioned or funded literally hundreds of studies about violence against women. A high-profile example at the federal level alone is the \$10 million traveling commission, the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, which issued a national action plan with over a hundred recommendations in 1993. The women's movement has also been busy with documentation of the problem and the charting of effective solutions, as it is on the front line of mopping up the blood every day. Government has taken no action on the majority of the recommendations in these hundreds of reports, particularly in the areas of economic equality and housing which are fundamental necessities for women escaping abuse.

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

www.criaw.icref.ca/factsheets/violence

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METRAC

The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) is a community organization that promotes the rights of women and children to live free from violence and the threats of violence. www.metrac.org

Working in collaboration with individuals, community groups, government agencies, police, educational institutions and legal and medical professions, METRAC helps build effective partnerships and coalitions of people interested in making their community a safer place.

OWJN is a project of METRAC. The goal of the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) is to promote an understanding of the law with respect to the issue of violence against women and children. They provide accessible legal information to women and their supporters in a manner that reflects the experiences and realities of women. They also review and analyse written law (legislation) and case law (court decisions).

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of "ordinary" people who work together to achieve extraordinary results. Each day they stand in solidarity with - and help protect - individuals and communities around the world whose human rights are under attack. They appeal for the violations to stop. They mobilize public pressure to prevent human rights abuses from taking place. www.amnesty.ca

Canadian officials have too long ignored the threat to Indigenous women in Canadian towns and cities. Many are missing, some have been murdered and Canadian authorities are not doing enough to stop the violence, says Amnesty International in a report, ***Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada***, recently released.

"All women have the right to live in safety and dignity but overt cultural prejudice and official indifference have put the Indigenous women of Canada in harm's way," says Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "As a priority, the Governments at all levels in Canada must work with Indigenous women in the country to ensure that no more 'sisters' are 'stolen' from their communities as the result of discrimination and violence."

POLICE SERVICES

Either York Regional Police or Metropolitan Toronto Police: Domestic Violence Unit will provide a speaker for the September 17th Standing Committee Meeting.

"Domestic Violence is a crime, which without intervention increases in severity and frequency," said Sgt. Lorna Kozmik, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator for the Community Programs Unit. "Prompt action, thorough investigation and referrals to other community assistance providers all play a part in unmasking this crime," Kozmik said.

The Toronto Police Service has produced a pamphlet for victims entitled, ***Are You In An Abusive Relationship?*** This pamphlet contains valuable referral information to other community assistance providers where victims can obtain ongoing support for themselves and their families.