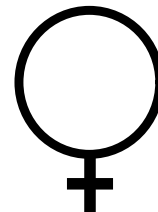


NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION
ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
December 6, 1999

Questions and Answers



on violence against women

On December 6, 1989
14 young women were
brutally murdered
at l'École Polytechnique
de Montréal.

Every day in Canada,
women are denigrated,
humiliated, scorned, insulted,
shoved, kicked, hit, attacked,
beaten, violated, disfigured,
tortured, threatened with a
weapon or assassinated.

Q: What is violence against women?

A: In the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, the term violence refers to “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical sexual, sexual or psychological harm, or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

Source:

United Nations (1995) *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration*, p. 73, declaration 112.

Q: What are the most common forms of violence against women?

A: Violence against women can take many forms. It is most commonly divided into the following dimensions:

Psychological violence: Encompasses various tactics to undermine a woman's self-confidence such as yelling, insults, mockeries, threats, abusive language, humiliation, harassment, contempt, threats, deliberate deprivation of emotional care or isolation.

Physical violence: The most obvious, ranges from pushing and shoving to hitting, beating, physical abuse with a weapon, torture, mutilation and murder.

Sexual violence: Any form of non-consensual sexual activity (i.e., forced on a person) ranging from harassment, unwanted sexual touching to rape. This form of violence also includes incest.

Financial violence: Encompasses various tactics for total or partial control of a couple's finances, inheritance or employment income. May also include preventing a partner from taking employment outside the home or engaging in other activity that would lead to financial independence.

Spiritual abuse: Works to destroy an individual's cultural or religious beliefs through ridicule or punishment, forbidding practice of a personal religion or forcing women or children to adhere to religious practices that are not their own, etc.

Source:

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993), *Final Report, Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence~Achieving Equality*, p. 6-7.

Q: What is criminal harassment?

A: Criminal harassment, commonly referred to as “stalking” is persistent, malicious, unwanted surveillance; an invasion of privacy that is a constant threat to an individual's personal security. The stalker may begin by telephoning and harassing a woman, her friends and family, persistently following her, spending extended periods of time watching someone's home or place of work, watching her movements, etc. In June 1993, the federal government passed a law creating a new offence of “criminal harassment” to deal with stalking.

Source:

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993), *Final Report, Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence ~ Achieving Equality*, p. 48.

Q: Are some women more vulnerable to violence than others?

A. All women are vulnerable to male violence. Violence can touch women of all ages and all ethno-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. But some women are more vulnerable than others and their degree of risk is dictated by factors including their class, culture, race, colour of skin, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, education, age, where they live, their language, etc. Women facing multiple barriers in our society, namely Aboriginal women, immigrant women and members of visible minorities, women with a disability, lesbians, young women and third-age women, are at greater risk of experiencing violence. It is also important to recognize the needs of women who are isolated or marginalized from the mainstream because one or more of these factors.

Source:

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993), Final Report, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence ~ Achieving Equality*, p. 59.

Q: Why are some men violent?

There is no simple answer to this question. The phenomenon of violence against women is complex and is the result of a combination of factors. Among other things, male violence is the result of behaviours they learn at a young age to express their “masculinity”. Men learn early on to use power as a way to dominate and control others around them. This way of thinking makes the use of violence more acceptable in their eyes. Most of these acts of violence are an attempt to assert control over women, children or other men. Paradoxically, most violent acts by men are a fundamental sign of weakness, insecurity, lack of self-esteem combined with a capacity for physical and verbal domination and a feeling that they should be superior and in control to be a “real” man. Violence therefore, becomes an attempt to affirm power, privilege and control. The social structure which sustains and maintains gender inequalities such as the general acceptance by our society of subordination of women to men, and the subordination of certain women to other women, or the socio-sexual roles of men and women driven by their religion, the media, and culture, contribute to perpetuate this way of thinking and acting. The lack of severe penalties for violent acts compared with the gravity of these acts also contributes to encouraging violence in men. While there are many explanations for violence, there are no excuses.

Source:

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993), *Final Report, Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence~Achieving Equality*, p. 59. White Ribbon Campaign, flyer and information booklet « *What every man can do to help end men's violence against women* ».

Q: Is violence not just a simple loss of self-control?

A. Although problems of human relations, stress, alcohol and drug consumption, depression or unemployment, for example, can contribute to violence against women, we cannot accept these as either excuses for, or root causes of, violence. How do you explain then that some people faced with the same challenges, do not choose a course of violence and do not take out their problems on women? According to feminist analysis, a spouse who manifests verbal abuse, psychological, physical, social or financial violence against his partner is not “losing control”. On the contrary, it is an affirmation of his own power that he wants to conserve at any cost. In fact, when a man “chooses” to beat his partner it is because he has the “right” and the means to do so.

Source:

The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993), Final Report, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence ~ Achieving Equality*, p. 5-6.

Q: What are the consequences of violence against women?

A : Violence against women carries heavy consequences for those who are victims and for society.

For female victims of violence: The consequences are not identical from one person to another. They vary according to factors such as the nature and gravity of the abuse, duration, personality of the victim, the support network and resources available. Among the psychological consequences, are fear, distrust, anxiety, feelings of guilt and/or shame, loss of self-esteem, difficulty concentrating, depression and thoughts of suicide, use of drugs and alcohol and/or other medications, etc. Physical signs of abuse include wounds, restless sleep, nightmares, insomnia, nausea, etc. Social indicators of abuse include being isolated, being stigmatized, failing grades in school or poor performance at work, absenteeism, financial difficulties, etc.

For society: Fear of aggression is present not only in the lives of victims of abuse but also in the lives of many women. How many women do not dare to travel alone, go on a nature hike, stay out late or walk home alone in the evening, etc.? Furthermore, because violence is a learned behaviour, children exposed to abusive relationships are at risk for being abusers themselves.

Sources:

Moisan, M. (1993) *Pour que cesse l'inacceptable : avis sur la violence faite aux femmes*, Gov. of Québec, Status of Women Council, p. 19-23. Priour, D. et al (1992) *Taking action: A union guide to ending violence against women*, BC Federation of Labour and Women's Research Centre, 52 p.