

The Family Violence Prevention Project

WOMAN ABUSE **Hurts** **Everyone**

Woman abuse has serious health effects on women, children, families and our community.



Woman Abuse
What is it?

3

5 Myths About
Woman Abuse

4

Domestic Violence
and Children

7

The Victim Witness
Assistance Program

8

A Personal Story

10

This report is dedicated to victims of woman abuse and the children exposed to the abuse.

The Family Violence Prevention Project

“We ask because we care.”



Dr. G. Allen Heimann,
Medical Officer
of Health,
Windsor-Essex
County Health Unit



public health issue. Over 1200 health care professionals, social workers, teachers, day care providers, police officers and others have come to education sessions about woman abuse. Pamphlets and educational resources have been developed for professionals and the public. Committee members have been at many community events giving information to the public and agencies in our community who can give information to women who need it. The project committee has also developed television commercials and poster campaigns.

Victims of woman abuse suffer serious emotional, physical, sexual and other health problems. Children

Several tragedies over recent years in Windsor-Essex County have provided us with an up close look at the grim reality of male violence and abuse against their female spouses and partners in our community. Through these tragedies we have also been confronted with the reality of the devastating effects woman abuse has on children, family members, friends of the victims and the larger community.

Since 2001 the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit and community partners have been working together on the Family Violence Prevention Project. Funding for the project is being provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to health units across Ontario. This is the fifth and final year of the project.

Project committee members have been teaching health care professionals and the public about woman abuse. It is now commonly known that woman abuse causes many health problems and because of this it has become an important

Many Thanks...

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exposed to woman abuse in the home are more likely to be harmed emotionally and physically than children living in non-abusive homes. Approximately 1 in 3 or 30% of Canadian women have been abused in some way by their partners or spouses (Statistics Canada, 1993). According to T. Day in his 1995 book *Health Related Costs of Violence Against Women in Canada, Tip of the Iceberg*, woman abuse costs our health care system at least 1.5 billion dollars each year. Woman abuse needs to be discussed in our community everyday, not only when tragedies make the front page of the newspaper.

Now is the time to learn all that we can about woman abuse in order to help women at risk and the children exposed to woman abuse. If you or someone you know is being abused in any way call Hiatus House 519-252-7781 or Windsor Essex Health Unit 519-258-2146 Ext. 1350 (Intake Nurse). **Get Safe! Get Help!**

For more information on woman abuse go to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence website at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nctv-cnivf/familyviolence/index.html>

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (2002) *Woman Abuse*. Retrieved 2006, from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nctv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/woman%20abuse%20-%20e.pdf>

WOMAN ABUSE

What is it?

Woman abuse is any intentional act of violence, abuse, maltreatment, and/or neglect that a woman experiences from her intimate partner, or caregiver. Woman abuse can include, but is not limited to physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, social, economical and/or religious abuse.

No woman is exempt from abuse. It occurs regardless of a woman's age, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Pregnant women, able-bodied women, disabled women, women with chronic illnesses, rich and poor are all at risk of abuse. A 2003 Statistics Canada report indicates that women between the ages of 25-34 report the highest rate of abuse by a partner or spouse. Abuse may be a one-time event or occur on a regular basis.

Types of woman abuse may include but are not limited to

Emotional/Verbal Abuse

- name calling
- threatening injury or death
- threatening to take away her children
- withholding affection
- isolating her from family and friends

Financial or Economic Abuse

- withholding money yet forcing her to pay the bills
- preventing her from working
- keeping family finances a secret
- spending money on addiction, gambling, and sexual services

Religious/Spiritual Abuse

- preventing her from practicing her religion
- using religion to justify abuse
- putting down her spiritual beliefs

Physical Abuse

- hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, choking, or shaking
- burning her
- restraining her in anyway

Sexual Abuse

- any unwanted sexual touching
- forcing her to have sex
- forbidding the use of birth control, insisting on an abortion
- infecting her with an STI (sexual transmitted infection)

Remembering Janet

Word of my niece Janet's death...

from domestic violence stunned our whole family. The reality that one person could decide that Janet would no longer live was beyond our comprehension. But amidst the shock and anger we talked about all of Janet's attributes that endeared her to us. I chose to put these remembrances into a song, and sing it at Janet's memorial service.

It's our way of validating her life. Though the actions of one person took her from us, there are many more people who knew and loved Janet, and our love continues to be stronger than the force that took her.

I am pleased to share Janet's Song: Written on the Wind as a tribute to Janet, and also with the hope that all who find themselves in oppressive relationships may find their way to the light.

Brian Stocks

Written on the Wind: Janet's Song - by Brian Stocks

You came into the world, one winter's day so long ago
When all the ground was white with snow,
Your journey here on earth at once begun;
Your gifts of love you shared, in visions
That flowed through your hands,
Your paintings how they graced the land
With spirit and a beauty all your own.

And as the years went by,
Your travels took you near and far,
A spirit that could reach the stars,
Yet grow a tender garden here below;
The ocean waves you graced,
And in tender moments face to face
Gave life to children who would grow
To join the band of those who love you so.

And then your sky it darkened, the sun had gone away,
And then the clouds of night moved in,
Your stars they all grew dim,
A force unseen then carried you away;
Then the gates of heaven opened,
And what was night for you,
Became a bright new summer's day.

And as we travel on,
We'll feel your presence in the rain,
Your spirit rides across the seas,
Your fragrance floats among the summer breeze;
For now we say goodbye,
As your spirit soars across the sky,
Yet I know one day we'll meet again,
For it's written on the wind.

Effects of WOMAN ABUSE

Abuse can undermine all aspects of a woman's life.

Effects of abuse may include:

- addictions • low self-esteem • physical injuries/death
- depression, suicidal thoughts, eating or sleeping disorders
- sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS
- difficulty with daily tasks or work

The reasons why a woman stays in an abusive relationship are complex.

The real question to be asked is why he doesn't stop abusing her!

If you or someone you know is being abused, there are various organizations that can help protect you and your children.

Call Hiatus House at 519-252-7781 or the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit Intake Nurse at 519-258- 2146 ext: 1350.

Reference:

M.Boyd (2000). *Task Force on the Health Effects of Woman Abuse Final Report*. London, Ontario: Author.

Help For Children

Hiatus House offers two programs for children and youth who have been exposed to domestic violence.

The Crossroads Program

The Crossroads Program is for groups of children and youth aged 4-16 who have been exposed to domestic violence. Boys and girls aged 4-7 and 8-12 are seen in groups together. The teens are in separate groups led by staff of the same gender. Crossroads is for children staying in the shelter and for children living at home with their mothers separated from an abusive spouse.

Groups are co-led by Child and Youth counselors. Groups meet once a week for ten weeks at the shelter. Topics covered in group include: violence, safety planning, protecting yourself, who is responsible for the violence, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, self-esteem, feelings, stress reduction and family challenges. The School Based Program is also for children who have been



Continued on page 12

References:

Prince Edward Island Woman Abuse Protocols (n.d.) *Myths and facts about woman abuse*. Retrieved 2006, from <http://www.isn.net/cliapei/womanabuse/myths.htm>

Education Wife Assault (n.d.) *Woman abuse: Dispelling the myths*. Retrieved 2006, from <http://www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/myths.html>

Why does a woman stay? She may stay because she:

- loves the abuser and hopes the abuse will stop
- believes she has nowhere to go
- feels pressured by family & friends to stay in relationship
- lacks money • thinks she can't make it without him
- has few job skills • does not speak English or French
- the abuser may have threatened to kill her, her children, family members or himself if she leaves
- fears the abuser will take away the children
- believes children need their fathers

5 Myths About Woman Abuse

Myth: Woman abuse is a private family matter.

Fact: Physical violence is assault. Assault is a crime whether it occurs inside or outside of the home.

Myth: Woman abuse happens to only certain types of women, such as those with low socio-economic status.

Fact: Abuse is not specific to one race, age, religion, social or economic status.... IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE!

Myth: The abuse can't be that bad, or she would leave.

Fact: A woman stays in an abusive relationship for various complex reasons: she loves the abuser; she believes the abuse will stop; he threatens to kill her if she leaves; she does not want to break up the family; she lacks support and financial means, and/or has no place to go.

Myth: Abuse is caused by alcohol and drug use.

Fact: This is a dangerous myth. It allows the abuser to be excused from his actions due to being impaired. Abuse stems from an individual's desire to have power and control over others.

Myth: Men who abuse their partners are mentally ill.

Fact: Most men who abuse their partners are not mentally ill. An abuser is able to control his violence and only his partner is the victim of his abuse.

Are You Being Emotionally or Verbally ABUSED?

How do you know if you are being emotionally or verbally abused?

Do you feel like there is something wrong with your relationship but you can't quite name what it is? Do you feel like it is impossible to please your partner? Do everyday conversations with your spouse leave you wondering what you have done wrong? Do you sometimes feel as if you are the enemy? Does your partner give you the silent treatment for no apparent reason? Do you feel as if you are not valued in your relationship? Are you told in words or actions that you don't deserve things? Are problems in your relationship never resolved? Does your partner withhold affection? Are you prevented from going to school or work or from learning English? Does your partner threaten to take your children from you?

Emotional abuse, like every other form of abuse, is about power and control. However, the tactics used may be very subtle and difficult to detect and don't involve the use of physical force. The abuser puts down his victim. Eventually she may not recognize the woman she has become and may feel tired and discouraged, sick, anxious, defeated and depressed much of the time.

Victims of emotional abuse describe the behaviors used by abusers. These include subtle put-downs, denying saying things, ignoring her, turning the children against her and calling her names. Abuse is often done in private so that no one else is aware. He may accuse her of being unfaithful. He may keep friends and family from her. He may twist her words around and tell her she doesn't know what she is talking about. Abusers use these behaviors to gain power and control over the woman. Abuse generally gets worse over time and may lead to physical abuse.

Women who find themselves in emotionally or verbally abusive relationships need to know that there is help for them too. Emotional abuse can be even more damaging than physical abuse. Shelters accept women who have not been physically abused and are emotionally abused. Counseling services are available and victims are encouraged to seek help.

References:

Evans, P. (1992). *The verbally abusive relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond*. (Expanded Second Edition). Avon, MA: Adams Media Corporation.

Jameson, Beals, Lalonde & Associates, Inc. (1999). *A handbook for health and social service professionals responding to abuse during pregnancy*. Ottawa: Health Canada.



ABUSE During Pregnancy

Abuse does not end when a woman becomes pregnant. Abuse may begin or escalate during pregnancy. A 1993 Canadian study revealed that 21% of women abused by their partners were assaulted during their pregnancy. Of these women, 40% reported the abuse began when they became pregnant (Health Canada, 1999).

A pregnant woman is being abused, if her intimate partner or spouse:

- forces her to have an abortion
- forces her to continue an unwanted pregnancy
- restricts, controls, withholds, or forbids prenatal care
- intentionally harms her, causing a miscarriage
- refuses to have sex on the basis that her body is unattractive
- limits her food intake
- does not provide emotional support during her pregnancy.

Abuse does not end when the child is born; it continues if the abuser:

- does not assist or support her when she and the baby return home from the hospital
- forces her to have sex before she is ready
- criticizes her parenting abilities

If you or someone you know is being abused,

- call Hiatus House 252-7781 (24 hours)
- tell someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, doctor or public health nurse. Have a safety plan in place.

The Routine Universal Comprehensive Screening (RUCS) Protocol

The RUCS protocol was designed by the *Task Force on the Health Effects of Woman Abuse* and the Middlesex-London Health Unit. The RUCS protocol was designed for health care professionals to use in practice settings.

What does this mean for women in Windsor-Essex County?

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit and community partners have been working together since 2002 on the Family Violence Prevention Project. Health care professionals have been educated about woman abuse and how to ask patients about abuse. The main goal is to educate doctors, nurses or other health care professionals about woman abuse and to encourage them to routinely and universally screen all female

patients over the age of 12 for all forms of abuse.

Why ask women about abuse?

Studies show that victims of woman abuse suffer more health problems than women who have not been abused. Children exposed to violence in the home have problems very much like children who have been victims of physical abuse by an adult. Woman abuse is an important issue because of how abuse hurts women and children's health. Victims often hide abuse. Woman abuse affects women of all types regardless of race, religion, education and socioeconomic status. Asking about abuse gives healthcare professionals an opportunity to teach women about abuse and to offer victims and children exposed to abuse the help they need.



by frequent moves when a parent is seeking a safe place to live. Seeing or hearing loved ones fight creates emotional pain in the child. Witnessing violence also creates the “fight or flight” response. The child’s body and mind stay alert and ready for sudden fear-driven action. This response may persist, creating deep tension, restlessness, and powerful memories of the violence.

The child may believe they need to be “on guard” for danger in order to protect themselves, or their parent or siblings. Because children have little power to protect themselves and others, they can become anxious. Concentrating on school work may become difficult. A child can come to believe that he or she is the cause of the fighting or the break-up of the family. The child may learn disrespectful and abusive ways of relating to other people. He or she may have difficulty solving problems, handling anger and relieving frustration in a respectful, effective manner. A repeating cycle of conflict, violence, and “making up” may lead children to believe that adults cannot live up to promises to take care of the family. Hence, the child may mistrust their parents and feel a lack of hope. The child may learn to copy a parent’s use of anger, threats, verbal abuse and violence to gain power and control. Once the family is safe, they may benefit from assistance to learn how to change the way members of the family relate to each other.

There are services such as Hiatus House 519-252-7781 and the Domestic Violence program at Windsor Regional Hospital 519-255-2234 which can help people become safe and stay safe. Counselling and therapy with your child and family can help heal the aftermath of violence. Consider calling the Windsor Regional Children’s Centre at 519-257-5215.

Dr. Ralph Billingsley, Psychologist
Windsor Regional Children’s Centre

Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

He or she may have difficulty solving problems, handling anger and relieving frustration in a respectful, effective manner.

At the Windsor Regional Children’s Centre we sometimes see that violence harms children and families long after it has ended. How does the experience of violence lead to long-lasting distress? Violence punctures the feeling of safety in the home. The child fearfully wonders: “am I safe?”-“is my parent safe?”-“will it happen again?”. This insecurity may be heightened

Domestic Violence and Children

“One way domestic violence harms children directly, is when the abuser injures them on purpose to scare and control their spouse or partner.”



The Windsor-Essex Children’s Aid Society (WECAS) provides child protection services under the Child and Family Services Act. This means that WECAS is the agency that assesses and investigates reports of child abuse and neglect. Also, WECAS provides counselling and other services to protect children from physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect.

It is now commonly known among professionals working with children that living in homes where there is domestic violence puts children at risk of emotional and physical harm. Children who are exposed to or harmed by domestic violence may require the services of the Children’s Aid Society. If parents willingly act to ensure the children’s safety the Children’s Aid Society may not have to become involved. It is important to be aware that children can be harmed directly and indirectly as a result of domestic violence.

One way domestic violence harms children directly is when the abuser injures them on purpose to scare and control their spouse or partner. Children may also be hurt during attacks on their mother. For example, younger children may be hit when the mother is holding the child and her partner assaults her. Injuries to older children may occur when the child tries to help their mother during a violent episode. Children can also be harmed indirectly by domestic violence. Studies show that children who are

exposed to domestic violence are also at risk of harm. Children exposed to domestic violence are known to suffer emotional and behavioural problems similar to children who have been physically abused.

Research also shows that in many child abuse and neglect cases there is domestic violence in the home. In Windsor-Essex County about 21% of child protection investigations at the WECAS involve domestic violence. Because of this, the Children’s Aid Society will investigate domestic violence cases to assess for physical and emotion harm to the children or the risk of such harm.

Once the Children’s Aid Society decides to do an investigation, a detailed plan on how to proceed is developed.

WECAS staff is required to interview each child individually when doing an investigation. This has been found to be the best way for workers to see what effect the exposure to domestic violence has had on the children. Parents in violent relationships tend to underestimate what their children have been exposed to. Even in cases where children may not have seen an assault they are still affected by the climate of fear in the home and the impact of violence on their mother. A child’s age,

maturity and level of understanding of the violence also influence his/her reaction to it. Following the interviews with the children the non-offending parent, most often the mother, will be interviewed. WECAS workers try to ensure her safety by interviewing her without the abusive partner being present. When interviewing adult victims every attempt is made to ensure that she is not re-victimized. The worker’s focus is on the need to protect the children.

Often victims of domestic violence minimize the severity, the frequency and the impact of living with violence on their children. Parents may report that the children were asleep in bed and did not witness the violence. Minimizing or denying abuse may help a victim to cope. She may fear further violence if she reports the abuse.

Continued on page 8

Yesterday You Said You Loved Me

Yesterday you said you loved me
and then you put your hands around my throat.
Yesterday you said I couldn’t cook
and then you threw the food against the wall.
Yesterday you said it was all my fault
and then you hurled a glass at my face.
Yesterday you said I was a rotten mother
and then you took the boys out to play while I cried.
Yesterday you said I was a lousy lover
and then you had an affair.
Yesterday you said I could never leave you
and then you held the lighter flame to my hair.
Yesterday you said I was fat and ugly and stupid
and then . . .

Today I ran a marathon.
Today I have a master’s degree.
Today I recognize that I am a great mom.
Today I embrace my beauty.
Today I trust my intelligence.
Today I know I am loved.
Today I am alive!
Today I declare no one will ever abuse me again.

Victim/Witness Assistance Program

The Government of Ontario is committed to giving victims of crime a stronger voice by supporting them through all stages of the legal process. The Victim/Witness Assistance Program of the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat, Ministry of the Attorney General, is one of the programs intended to help victims of crime. It was started as a "court based" program that offers services to victims/witnesses of crime in cases where criminal charges have been laid, and they must testify in criminal court.

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program provides information, assistance and support to victims of crime throughout the court process in order to help them understand and participate.

Services are offered on a priority basis to those who have been most traumatized by a crime. Most of the program's clients are victims of partner assault, sexual assault, child abuse or hate crimes, families of homicide victims, elderly victims and vulnerable victims with special needs.

In December 2000, the Domestic Violence Court Initiative was introduced in Windsor. It gives priority to the safety and needs of domestic assault victims and their children. The program involves teams of police, Crown Attorney, Victim/Witness Assistance staff, Probation and Parole staff, offender counseling staff, and cultural interpreters who work together to better meet the needs of victims of domestic assault.

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program is an important part of the criminal justice response to domestic violence cases. Program staff work closely with the Crown, police and community agencies to make sure victims of domestic violence get the right help.

Services include giving information about the client's case, the court process, their role as a witness, crisis intervention, needs assessment, referrals to community agencies, ongoing emotional support, advocacy, court preparation and orientation and follow-up activities.

Lynn Kainz, BA, BSW, RSW

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program office is located in the Windsor Crown Attorney's Office in the Ontario Court of Justice at 200 Chatham Street East, Windsor. The hours of operation are Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 5:00 p.m. The phone number is 519-253-2897.

Continued from page 7

Minimization may also be an honest report of a woman's current understanding of her situation. There are times when a victim will refuse to speak to a WECAS worker about domestic violence. Historically domestic violence has been considered a 'family secret' and a topic to be avoided.

The Children's Aid Society will also try to interview the offending partner. However, he may refuse to meet with the worker on the advice of their lawyer. When the offender remains in the home or agrees to be interviewed he is referred to counselling services. The abuser is the one who needs to be held accountable for his behaviour and is responsible to change his behaviour and this is the purpose of counselling.

If an investigation shows that the allegations of domestic violence were false and children are not at risk the case will be closed with no further action.

When the allegations of domestic violence are found to be true the worker must next develop a plan with the family. There are two main things to be considered for the family. The level of community supports in place and the strengths that the family has will be looked at to see how any risk to the children can be reduced. If there are enough supports in place, and the family goes to counselling the case may be closed.

However, if the family has little support, few strengths or the violence was severe or repeated the file will usually go to the Family Services Department at the Society for

ongoing support. A plan to address the concerns will be developed with the family and include extended family, community agencies, service providers and other supports available to the family. The plan includes ways to ensure the family's safety.

When the offender is out of the home, the plan may limit his access to the victim and the children. If the couple continues to live together the plan outlines ways that the woman can safely protect herself and her children. The plan includes who she is to call for help, how to leave the home safely, and what support can be put into place for the family. Society workers make every effort to ensure that the family is safe until they can be connected to supports.

WECAS staff works very closely with community service partners. Community service partners include Domestic Violence Program, Hiatus House, Hotel Dieu Grace Hospital, Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Public Safety and Security, Multicultural Council of Windsor, Office of the Crown Attorney, Windsor Regional Hospital, Victim Witness Assistance Program, and all area police services to ensure the safety of both women and children.

The Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society works to fulfil their mission which is dedicated to the well-being and safety of every child by advocating for and partnering with, our children, families and communities.

Donna Dordevski, MSW,
Director Family Services
Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society

References:

Carter, L., Weithorn, L., & Behrman, R. (1999). Domestic violence and children: Analysis and recommendations. *Domestic Violence and Children*, 9(3), 4-20.

Risk Factors of Domestic Violence HOMICIDE

A man beat his wife so severely she almost died. A woman and her three children were murdered by her ex-partner. A man stabbed his wife to death. A young girl was killed by her father in the midst of an attempt to kill the child's mother. These headlines evoke strong emotions and questions among individuals who knew the victim(s) as well as those who did not. One common question that often arises is "Were there any warning signs?" Although research in the field of domestic violence is fairly new, the warning signs that place women at a high risk of homicide or attempted homicide have been identified. The most common warning sign appears to be an actual or pending separation. During this time, the abuser can become very destructive and may decide to kill her. The abuser believes the victim should have given him another chance, he can't live without her, she belongs to him, and he will do anything to prevent her from being with

someone else. Other warning signs that women are at a high risk of domestic violence homicide include:

- the abuse against the victim gets worse over time
- the abuser owns or has access to a weapon
- the abuser has threatened to kill her, her children or her pets
- the abuser stalks her and knows where she goes
- the abuser is extremely jealous and possessive
- the abuser is depressed and/or suicidal
- the abuser has a significant criminal record and history
- the abuser is drinking and/or using drugs excessively
- there are child custody and access disputes between the victim and the abuser.

Recognizing the above factors can help a woman recognize the danger she and her children may be in. A woman should also rely on and listen to her internal thoughts. If she feels her partner (ex-partner) is capable of extreme violence, even though he has not been violent in the past, seek assistance from a local woman's shelter, such as Hiatus House.

Reference:

Bancroft, Lundy. (2002). *Why does he do that?: Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. New York, N.Y.: G.P. Putnam.

O'Marra, Al, J.C. (2004). *Domestic Violence Death Review Committee: Annual Report to the Chief Coroner. Ontario: Office of the Chief Coroner.*



Hiatus House Fresh Start Partner Assault Response Program

The Hiatus House Fresh Start Partner Assault Response (PAR) program is a group intervention for individuals who have abused their spouses or partners. Last year 433 court ordered clients attended the program (21 of these were women), and 110 men attended the voluntary program. The types of abuse addressed in the groups include physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, property and pet abuse.

The PAR is a court ordered program that is funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General and works closely with the Crown Attorney's Office, Victim Witness Assistance Program, Probation and Parole and Windsor and Essex County Police

Departments. The common goal that unites these organizations is the protection of victims of domestic violence. Individuals who are court ordered to Fresh Start must attend 16 group sessions held once a week. The main goal of the program is for group members to take responsibility for their abusive behaviours and end them. Once individuals join the program, they usually stop being physically abusive. Many continue to use other forms of abuse that may cause severe psychological and emotional damage.

After completing the court ordered group, individuals are invited to join the voluntary group program to continue working to end

their violent/abusive behaviours. Abusers are resistant to change their behaviours. However, clients who stay with Fresh Start an average of one-and-a-half to two years are usually quite successful at decreasing all forms of abuse. Abusive behaviour is learned behaviour and is usually rooted in the experience of being exposed to domestic violence in childhood.

The most common myth regarding Fresh Start is that it is an anger management program. Domestic violence is not caused by an anger problem that needs managing. Fresh Start clients are typically selective about who they direct their

Continued on page 12

ONE WOMAN'S STORY



“For all victims, it is not possible to return to the place we were before. We try to walk through the steps of our daily lives, numb and forever changed.”

you find me dead, this is the man who killed me.” This phone call was my initiation into a foreboding legal system fraught with many systemic pitfalls. However, I have nothing but praise for each agency and individual that assisted me.

As a victim of domestic violence, I experienced a wide range of emotions. At first I wanted to curl up into a ball and melt away. Then I wanted to fight back and make him pay, but this was a never-ending and exhausting task. As time passed, my life felt heavy and draining. I felt like I should just stand up, get over it, and get on with my life. But it was not possible. For all victims, it is not possible to return to the place we were before. We try to walk through the steps of our daily lives, numb and forever changed. I realized that I could not neatly put the pieces of my life back together, no matter how hard I tried and when I discovered this, I was angry!!! This anger fueled my return to a life that is now labeled “my life as a survivor.” This word is now used so often that I think our society has become desensitized to it, but you must know that all victims do not survive.

My plea today is for others to stop judging the victim and blaming her. I know that you can't stand by and watch some one return to an abusive partner but please stop adding to the struggle. There is so much shame when you feel trapped in the situation and if you know your family and friends are disappointed in you, it is worse. Be aware that the most violent and high risk time for a woman is she leaves and trust me, she knows it. He's been sure to tell her what will happen when she leaves. Leaving is not a one time deal. It may take many tries and sadly some women never get out. You can encourage her to leave, tell her you're worried about her and hope that when she is ready and able, that she can get out alive. Whether it is a physical or a psychological end, not everyone makes it out. I was one of the lucky ones that did. I am happy to say that I have been safe and living the next part of my life for the past nine years and yes, there is life after abuse! - Debra Fowler

“My experience with domestic violence was a four and a half month whirlwind, that I characterize as *my made for TV movie*.”

As an independent, educated woman, I met and dated a man for six weeks. Then I wanted to end the relationship, but somehow I couldn't find a way out. I was scared, but I can't say why as he had done nothing to hurt me, but that quickly changed. The day I did break up with him he assaulted me for 1 1/2 hours, and this was only the beginning of several months of terror. I was stalked, assaulted five times, strangled, bitten, drugged to the point of unconsciousness twice, sexually assaulted twice, tied up, beaten and held against my will, repeatedly threatened with knives, and threatened with a sawed-off shotgun—all in the name of love. After the first assault, I left town to hide but the very day that I returned, he found me and I endured the most cruel and sadistic rape while being told “This is your punishment. This is the price you pay for leaving me in the first place.” I had done all the right things: I recognized the abuse, I left, I had family support and then all of a sudden I was back in a much worse situation. I was defeated.

Through all of this I was too afraid to call the police, and when I finally found the courage to call, I did so only to tell the police “when

Her Oppression Maureen Rudall, Detective

averted eyes meet in a moment of understanding wet with the knowing of an others pain this badge that once shone with the brilliant ideals of equality has been stained by the tears of her oppression

The Media and Woman Abuse: Who Is Shaping Your Child's Self-Image and Values?

At times, parenting can be difficult stuff. As a parent I often worry about - "Am I doing the right thing by my children?" "Am I teaching them how to be good people and to respect themselves and others?" I have two children, a son who is eleven and daughter who is seven. Both are bright, articulate and fun loving. Yet like a lot of parents I suspect, I worry about what impact today's fast paced, two parent working family, information overload and consumer driven society will have on them. Can I as a parent maintain some type of meaningful influence on how they will grow-up with all the different media, technology, and commercial sources bombarding them with lifestyle imaging?

I find it confusing and interesting that in today's post-modern feminist society, where women have worked so hard to achieve so much and where women are being seen and treated as equals in the workplace that society appears to be returning back to a time where women again are being portrayed in the mainstream media as being valued solely for their level of good looks and sexiness. I am not a prude, nor am I suggesting any type of censorship. Nor am I saying television is all bad. I am just saying that as a parent, and as a father, I struggle sometimes to keep on top of all the explaining needed to help my children understand and make sense of the images being presented to them. If my daughter doesn't fit the images being presented to her, will she suffer from self-esteem issues? Will she see herself as less valued than others? And will she be susceptible to woman abuse as a result? Will

my son know how to appropriately interact with women and understand that the images being presented to him are not necessarily real or the norm? Would he ever abuse a woman?

If children are what they live, and children are engaged in viewing and listening to multimedia material, more then ever, then does that mean my daughter will be a plastic surgery addict, boy crazy, girl gone wild and my son a rich athlete, slash gangster with half dressed women hanging all over him, while driving in a tricked out car? Will my son see women as prizes - something to own and control? I know I am exaggerating, but you have to admit I am not too far off from the truth on what images are being portrayed to our children in today's media. Our children are spending more and more time interfacing with multimedia products. I suspect they spend more time watching TV, playing on the computer and listening to their MP3 players than they are actually interacting with their parents. James Steyer in his book titled "The Other Parent" stated that "for millions of American kids, the media is, in fact, 'the other parent'- a force that is shaping their reality, setting their expectations, guiding their behavior, defining their self-image and dictating their interests, choices and values." I wonder about the media and the impact that it may have on our children's values and the role it plays in woman abuse.

As a parent I know how easy it is to allow "The Other Parent" to creep into our lives. It allows us to finish off a little more office work at home, it allows us to clean the



house and it allows us perhaps a little time for ourselves. But at what cost? Don't you feel sometimes that you are disengaged from your children? I once read that Canadian parents on average spend less then ten minutes a day actually speaking to their children.

I remember when I read that statement.

I thought about my

own interaction with my children. You know what? There were days when this was probably very true. I also thought about what Steyer stated - the media is defining our children's self-image and dictating their interests, choices and values. It made me think hard about where I learned my values and how I developed my self-image. In thinking back, I realized that my values and self image were formed by my relationships and interactions with others - namely my parents, teachers and friends.

My wife and I have made a conscious choice to work hard at spending more quality time with our children in an effort to help them shape their values and beliefs. There are no short cuts, or substitutes in the development of our children's self images and values. We need to spend meaningful time with our children and help them understand the images being presented to them by the media so they can make realistic choices, develop appropriate self images, values, healthy adult relationships and have an appropriate understanding of woman abuse issues.

Lyle Ward, MSW,
Family Services Supervisor
Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society

Suggested Readings:

Barbara Coloroso: *Just because it's not wrong doesn't make it right.*

From toddlers to teens, teaching kids to think and act ethically. Viking Canada (2005).

Steyer, James S: *The Other Parent.* Atria Books. (2002) New York

How Can You Help if Someone is Being **ABUSED?**



- *Listen to her* and believe her.
- *Do not judge* or give advice. Talk with her about her options.
- *If you believe she is in danger*, tell her. Physical safety is the first priority. Help her plan an emergency exit.
- *Respect her right* to confidentiality.
- *Allow her to feel* the way she does and support her decisions. Let her talk about the caring aspects of the relationship as well. Don't put down her feelings about her partner.
- *Don't criticize her* for staying with him, but share information on how abuse increases over time without intervention.
- *Give clear messages*: Violence is never okay. Her safety and her children's safety are always the most important issues. She does not cause the abuse and she is not alone.
- *Learn all you can* about the issue of woman abuse and about community resources that can help her.
- *Discuss how* violence affects children.
- *Be encouraged* that every time she reaches out for help she is gaining the emotional strength needed to make effective decisions.

Continued from page 4

The School Based Program

The School Based Program is also for children who have been exposed to domestic violence. This program offers individual and group counseling and classroom presentations at the elementary schools in Windsor and Essex County. Referrals come from school principals, teachers, Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society and other community-based programs. Again, the children's mother must be separated from her abusive partner and there must be no danger to the child for attending this program. Children stay in the program according to his/her needs.

What the Children Tell Us they have learned from counseling: "it is never okay to hit," "tell another grown up if your parents are fighting," "counseling helped me get a 'radar'—this means I'll be able to watch out for abusive people and know what to do," "I learned about relationships and warning signs for abuse," "I learned that the violence is not my fault," "I learned how to keep myself safe."

The Crossroads and School Based Programs provided by Hiatus House are funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Continued from page 9

violence towards. They abuse their partners. They do not abuse their employers, colleagues, neighbours, strangers or other family members. Outsiders do not know he is abusive. This is one of the reasons why their partner's disclosures of abuse are often met with shock or disbelief by others who have not witnessed this behaviour publicly.

Many court ordered clients first come to the program believing that they have already "learned their lesson". They disclose that they've decided never to be abusive to their partners again. It is painful for abusers to admit the truth that they have made this same commitment to change to themselves and to their partners many times before. Through supportive confrontation by the group, individuals are encouraged to face the truth that without help the cycle of their abusive behaviour will continue.

Asking for help from others takes courage. This is especially true because changing abusive behavior requires a huge commitment to make fundamental changes in the way one views, experiences and treats oneself and others in the world.

Mike Sultana, MSW, RSW
Clinical Co-ordinator
Hiatus House

For more information about the Fresh Start Partner Assault Response (PAR) program contact Hiatus House at 519-252-7781.

Reference:
Education Wife Assault (n.d.). *How to help an assaulted woman*. Retrieved 2004, from http://www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/friends__family.html

The Family Violence Prevention Project

Information provided by:

