



WOMAN ABUSE... IT'S A PROBLEM!

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

Woman abuse is a problem that no one ever wants to think will affect them. More than 27,000 cases of spousal violence were reported to police departments across Canada (Family Violence in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2000). Women aged 25-34 reported the highest rate of abuse by a partner or spouse (Family Violence in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2003).

Given these high rates of woman abuse, it is not surprising that it has been declared a public health priority in Canada. Various health care agencies are working to address this issue. For example, a local initiative encourages health care professionals to screen all women for the various forms of abuse: physical, sexual, and emotional. Physicians, dentists, nurses, and any

other health care provider, after being trained, will ask females 12 and older during health assessments if they have ever been abused.

There are numerous reasons to screen women for abuse. Routine and universal screening allows health care providers to address the problem. Asking women helps identify abuse and reduces the stigma that it only happens to certain types of women. This is important because abuse is not specific to one race, age, religion, social, or economic status...it can happen to anyone!

Inquiring about woman abuse is crucial. Research suggests that abused women are willing to disclose abuse when asked. In turn, health care providers can address specific health concerns and provide the necessary referral information.

Read on for more information about woman abuse and what you can do if you, or someone you know, is being abused.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE!

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| 1. Controlling a woman's money and who she sees is not abusive. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. If a child does not physically see his/her mother being abused, no harm is done to that child. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Health care professionals should ask female patients 12 and over if they have experienced abuse or been exposed to abuse. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Woman abuse is a public health priority in Canada. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. If you know someone is being abused by her partner or spouse, tell her to get out immediately. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Often, men who abuse their wives or partners are perceived as the "good guy" in the community. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. When an abused woman leaves the abuser, she is safe. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Workplaces can provide support to women who may be in an abusive relationship. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Women aged 25-34 are at the highest risk for woman abuse. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Some common myths about woman abuse

Myth: Woman abuse is not a problem in Canada.

Fact: Woman abuse is a problem. In Canada, one in four women are sexually or physically abused by an intimate partner.

Myth: Woman abuse is a private issue.

Fact: Physical violence is assault. Assault is a crime regardless if it occurs within or outside the home.

Myth: There is no help available for women in abusive relationships.

Fact: Help is available. There are various organizations available to assist abused women and their children (see back of brochure).

Addressing the myths of woman abuse may help reduce a woman's feeling of isolation. Often, an abused woman states that she did not disclose abuse for fear that no one would believe her.

see answers on back panel

Why

Why Is Woman Abuse An Issue?

The effects of woman abuse are devastating. Research has indicated that, on average, as many as thirty-seven women a year are murdered by intimate partners in Ontario (Overcoming the Truth About Power, Privilege and Oppression, 2003). Women who are abused by an intimate partner suffer serious physical, sexual, and psychological effects. Physical effects include broken bones, bruises, chipped or lost teeth, and internal injuries. Many women who are abused also suffer sexual health effects such as chronic pelvic pain, miscarriages, chronic vaginal or urinary tract infection, and bruising or tearing of the vagina or anus.

Also, many women who are abused experience psychological effects, including low self-esteem, dysfunctional parenting, self-abusive behaviour and acute anxiety. More severe psychological effects consist of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal thoughts or actions.

Pregnant women are at great risk of abuse. Health Canada reports 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 (Handbook for Health & Social Service Professionals Responding to Abuse During Pregnancy, 1999).

Many complications during pregnancy are linked to abuse. Some physical effects are related directly to violence. Other effects are indirect and may result from various factors, such as stress and isolation.

Aside from the devastating health effects, woman abuse also affects many aspects of a women's life such as her family, social life, and work environment.

Continued at the end of the "How" section, on the next page

How

How to Protect Yourself and

If you are being abused by your partner or spouse, you are not alone and you are not to blame. No reason justifies hitting or humiliating a woman. The abuser often claims his partner provoked him in order to avoid taking responsibility for his actions. This is not true. Abuse is the abuser's attempt to gain control and power over his partner.

You may have attempted to leave the abusive relationship, several times in fact, but decided to stay for various reasons:

- You love him and believe the abuse will stop.
- You stay for your children's sake. You believe the children need their father.
- You stay for financial reasons.
- You fear for your safety and your children's.
- You have no where to go and think no one will believe your story.
- Your family members and friends pressure you to stay.

The information contained in this brochure can help you protect yourself and your children. Knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse, being aware of

the warning signs of abuse, and having a safety plan in place are all important steps in protecting yourself and your children.

KNOW THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE

Abuse comes in various forms. Signs of physical abuse are usually more apparent: black eyes, broken bones and cracked teeth. However, there are other types of abuse, such as emotional abuse, in which the signs are not as obvious. Often, an abuser will isolate his victim, force her to separate herself from family, prevent her from seeing friends, or forbid her from going to religious services and social activities. These signs of emotional abuse are the most difficult to recognize but can be the most detrimental. Often, the abuser will intimidate his partner, make verbal threats against her, her children and/or family. The abuser can be extremely jealous and uses manipulation.

BE AWARE OF THE WARNING SIGNS

It is very important to understand that men who abuse do not usually stand out from other men. Many women have a relationship with a controlling man because they are unable to recognize the warning signs of potential abusers.

Men who abuse often fool women into believing that they are involved with someone who is loving, caring, and affectionate. Instead, they turn out to be dominating and manipulative.

In general, men who abuse women tend to

- be very controlling.
- feel they have the right to abuse or control their partner.
- focus only on themselves.
- blame their partner for their own abusive behaviour.
- be seen as the "good guy" in the community.

HAVE A SAFETY PLAN

If you are in an abusive relationship, you may feel that it is difficult to determine when is the "right time" to leave. Therefore, you need to be prepared for when the time comes.

In preparation, teach your children how and when to dial 911. Also, alert a trusted family member or friend of the situation and arrange for them to call 911 on your behalf if there are signs of violence. Remember that there may only be a short window of time for you and your children to leave safely.

You should take the following items with you:

What

What You Can Do If You Suspect that a Co-worker, Employee or Friend is Being Abused

If you suspect that a co-worker, employee, or friend is being abused, listen to her and be supportive. Tell her that you believe her story, and that she is not to blame. Tell her that no reason could ever justify abuse, and that abuse is wrong.

Do not judge her or give advice to her. Talk to her about her options. If you

believe she is in danger, help her plan an emergency exit.

Do not try to diminish her feelings about her partner and do not criticize her for staying with him. Share information about how the abuse will increase over time if she stays.

Also, learn all you can about the issue of woman abuse and about community resources that can assist women who are in an abusive relationship (see back of brochure).

Knowing that someone cares and believes her can help her make the right decision to get out of the abusive relationship.

Go for it!

RESOURCES AND WEBSITES

Contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit to receive resources and to schedule a free presentation on The Effects of Woman Abuse.
519-258-2146 x 1265

Education Wife Assault
416-968-3422
www.womanabuseprevention.com

Ontario Women's Directorate
www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/owd/index.html

Prevention Institute
www.preventioninstitute.org
Click on "Violence Prevention".

Health Canada - National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/femabus_e.html

Patricia Evan - Author of various books on verbal abuse
www.patriciaevans.com

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
www.ccohs.ca
Click on 'Psychosocial Issues', then click on 'Violence in the workplace'.

Health Effects of Woman Abuse Report
www.healthunit.com/reportsresearch.htm
Click on 'reports', then on 'choose article' and select 'Health Effects of Woman Abuse Report'.

Directory of Services on Access to the Justice System for Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women, Windsor-Essex County.
www.womanabuseprevention.com/Windsor2002.pdf

www.wehealthunit.org and at
www.windsor-heart-health.com

Your Children

- Important documents (i.e. birth certificates, passports, social insurance cards, health cards, driver's license, vaccination records, court documents)
- Money, credit cards, bankbooks, cheque books
- Keys for house, car, and office;
- Medication
- Familiar toy/blanket for each child
- Clothing for yourself and your children

When trying to decide whether or not to leave your abusive partner, it is important to remember the negative impact and potential harm that woman abuse can have on yourself and your children.

Keep in mind that one of the most dangerous times for a woman who is being abused is immediately after she leaves the abuser. He is furious with his loss of control over his partner. This can increase the risk of attempting to inflict serious harm or even death on her. However, the longer an abused woman stays with her abuser, the more frequent and severe the abuse will become.

If you decide to leave, there are several local agencies that can provide assistance to you and your children (see back of brochure).

Continued from "Why"

Woman abuse harms children. It is estimated that 11% to 23% of Canadian children have witnessed some form of violence against their mothers in the home (Health Canada, Handbook for Health & Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Women Abuse/Family Violence, 1999). Research reveals that children suffer many social, psychological, and behavioural after-effects. They often become aggressive towards siblings, friends, and teachers; are at a significant risk of delinquency, substance abuse, and school drop-out; experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, withdrawal, and lack of motivation; and develop eating and sleeping problems.

Woman abuse also places a tremendous financial burden on our society. Costs for health and social care associated with woman abuse are estimated to be 1.5 billion dollars per year. These costs include short-term medical and dental treatment for injuries; long-term physical and psychological care; lost time at work; and use of transition homes and crisis centres.

The reality is that woman abuse is a serious issue and it affects everyone, directly or indirectly.

CLIP & KEEP THIS INFO!

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

The following community agencies can help you or someone you know:

Windsor/Essex County Police Services
Emergency 911

Windsor/Essex County Police Services
OPP 1-888-310-1122
Amherstburg Police Services
736-8559

Essex Police Services 738-2222
LaSalle Police Services 969-5210
Leamington Police Services
326-6111

Windsor Police Domestic Assault Unit
255-6700
extension 4308 or 4317

Domestic Assault Shelter
and Counselling
Hiatus House (24 Hour) 252-7781

Sexual Assault Treatment Centre
(Metropolitan Campus)
Windsor Regional Hospital
255-2234

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit
(8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday)
Intake Nurse - information and referrals
258-2146 x 1350

Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society
(24 hr)
Intake/Protection/Legal Services
252-1171

Pass it on!

Please feel free to copy any articles in this brochure as long as you acknowledge the source.

Make it happen at your workplace!

Here are some ideas to assist your workplace in educating staff about woman abuse, as well as some suggestions to help support women who may be in abusive relationships:

- Display information about woman abuse, such as posters, fact sheets, and pamphlets on bulletin boards. This material can be obtained from the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit or Hiatus House.
- Place resources on woman abuse in private places, such as employee washrooms and staff rooms.
- Find out if the company's Employee Assistance Program provides services or referrals for abused women and their children.
- Find out if the security guards at your workplace are trained to deal with the safety needs of women who are being stalked at work. If not, discuss this issue with your Human Resources Manager.
- Provide a community presentation on woman abuse to employees that is offered by the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.
- Distribute information in paycheck envelopes on woman abuse and community services that offer help.
- If you suspect that a co-worker is being abused, talk with her and let her know that you care, are willing to listen, and that help is available.
- Organize/support a fundraising event to help raise money for your local woman abuse shelter.
- Ensure that your workplace policy against harassment and violence is up-to-date and followed.
- Protect an employee's confidentiality. If an employee discloses abuse, offer support.
- Assign a staff person to be a Woman's Advocate. One of their roles can be to listen, support, and help a woman in an abusive relationship to obtain the necessary services.
- Learn as much as you can about woman abuse so that you can provide support to women whom you know or suspect are in abusive relationships.

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Answers (from front page): 1-F • 2-F • 3-T • 4-T • 5-F • 6-T • 7-F • 8-T • 9-T

For more information about the Workplace Health Promotion Program, contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 258-2146 x 3100



This brochure and others in this series available online at:
www.wehealthunit.org and at www.windsor-heart-health.com