

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers'

November 1989

(INTERCEDE)

Sexual Harassment in the Domestic's Workplace

Domestic workers being mostly women are not only concerned with their rights as workers but also as women. One of those rights is the freedom to live without physical abuse, sexual assault or sexual harassment, or the right to live without fear of both.

In Canada, one of ten women is assaulted by her husband or boyfriend. One in four female children is sexually abused, and one in seven women has been raped. Two in ten women have been sexually harassed where they work.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline speaks to 400 women every month who have experienced these forms of abuse which we call violence against women and children. This type of violence does not know colour - women of all cultures and races and social backgrounds are assaulted, whether Caucasian, Black, Chinese, Filipino women.

Canadian laws say that women should be able to live without violence or the fear of it. But we all know that attitudes do not change quickly and that women are not yet safe in their own homes, on the street, or in their place of work.

Many of us have experienced or know of women who have experienced violence. Many of you have been hurt by your boyfriends or husbands. This may have included a push, a shove or a slap or a punch. Your boyfriend or husband may be extremely jealous and hurt you because he is convinced you are having an affair. He may put you down in front of others or call you names that are hurtful and demeaning. He may threaten that if you leave him, he will find you and hurt you more. He may tell

you what to wear and what to think and what to believe and may hit you if you don't obey. And if your husband or boyfriend is doing these things, he is also telling you that it is your fault and that you make him do it. You may have been forced to have sex in a way that you did not like. In Canada, whether you are married or not, this behaviour is called abuse, and physical abuse is against the law.

This kind of behaviour also happens to women where they work. We know that many of you have been approached sexually by someone whom you work for. In Canada, we call this sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is a specific kind of violence against women and happens to women wherever they work - in offices, factories and in private homes where women work either as babysitters, cleaners, domestics.

Sexual harassment of domestic workers is not something new. We are hearing more about it because the women's movement has helped us in airing these issues. Sexual harassment has always happened where women are in a position of economic and social dependency.

On the evening of February 8, 1915, Charles Albert Massey, a prominent member of one of Toronto's wealthiest and powerful families was shot in the chest by Carrie Davis, a short fair-haired girl of 18 who had been a domestic worker for the prior two years in his household. Massey had tried to coerce Davis into having sexual relations using verbal overtures and physical force. Davis was found not guilty on the grounds of self-defence. But her

Come to INTERCEDE's monthly meeting on Sunday, November 5, 1989 at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.

Cynthia Grant, director of the Company of Sirens, will conduct a theatre workshop.

There will be CLASP legal clinic and INTERCEDE counselling.

experience was not uncommon. Domestic servants were viewed as available for the pleasure of the rich. Like all domestics, she was paid very little, worked long hours and had no prospect of advancement. They were economically dependent on their harassers. For domestic servants, sexual harassment posed mortal danger.

At present, domestic workers face the same meagre pay, long hours, and economic dependency. In addition, domestic workers who have temporary status are still forced to live-in with their employers. This situation makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment or advances by male employers.

Defining Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment begins with hiring. Women are judged not only for their work skills but also for their physical attractiveness or sexual availability.

It continues when keeping a job, getting a raise, or better working conditions depend on tolerating sexual advances.

The forms of these advances vary: from clearly suggestive remarks or looks to mild physical encounters such as pinching or kissing.

In all cases, the message is clear: A woman's existence as a sexual being is more important than her work.

Sexual harassment is best described as male behaviour that focuses attention on the woman as a woman instead of as a worker.

How can you tell it is happening to you?

Many women are being sexually harassed without really being able to call it that. We feel that we are being over sensitive or silly if we don't feel comfortable with someone's behaviour. But it is important to know that if you feel uncomfortable, there is something happening that is not OK with you.

A person who you work for may make suggestive comments about your body, or look at your body in a way that makes you uncomfortable. Staring at our bodies makes us feel self-conscious. Recently a University of Toronto professor was found guilty of sexual harassing a student by staring at her body constantly while she was swimming. Being stared at is not always innocent or trivial, it can be harassing.

An employer might touch your body in a way that does not feel OK, like patting your buttocks or breasts. An employer may find ways to rub up against you or walk around with very few clothes on. An employer may also try to kiss you or suggest sexual relations.

You may find the employer quite attractive or may not. What is obvious however is that you are not free to make a choice because the relationship is one of unequal partners - and mutual sexual and intimate relationships depend upon equality. It is not possible to have a mutual relationship when one person is dependent on another, or when the man is concerned only with his own needs and not yours.

There have been cases reported to us where women who work in private homes have been raped by their employers.

Effects Of Sexual Harassment

The effects of being sexually harassed at work are severe. A woman is frightened that if she complains, she might lose her job and her status. She is frightened that if she complains, things could get worse, that she might be blamed by her friends or relatives. Being sexually harassed makes us feel anxious, worried, upset and angry. The worry and fear can cause physical symptoms such as headaches and upset stomachs. It can interfere in our relationships and isolate us from friends or family.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

MAIL TO: INTERCEDE, 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5

Please send DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS to:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY/PROVINCE:

POSTAL CODE: TELEPHONE:

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Intercede Members	FREE	Non-Member Domestic	\$ 5.00
Non-Profit Organizations	FREE	Others	\$10.00

But the worst thing that happens is that we blame ourselves and stay silent about sexual harassment. Keeping silent about abuse - whether by employer, boyfriend or husband - always makes things worse.

Women are not to blame - it is not the way we dress or the things we say or do that cause us to be abused in any of these ways by men. All of our institutions support the belief that men can be sexually dominant and abusive to women. Little boys grow up believing that being a man is being aggressive. Little girls grow up believing that it is important for a woman to be submissive and subservient. All of our cultures are male-dominated. Men make the rules and women do the caring emotional work to keep the family going.

When we get hurt, we then feel that we are failing as a wife or girlfriend or worker. We feel that in the case of a husband or a boyfriend that we can change him.

One of the reasons that it is hard for us to talk about the hurt we suffer from men is that we feel shame and humiliation. But we find out soon enough when we tell someone we trust, that many other women have suffered similar things. Talking to someone that you trust can help you feel better immediately. It helps you to not feel alone and so frightened.

It is important that you select someone to talk to that you trust, that that someone will keep the information confidential and not do anything you don't want to do. That someone can be a friend, a relative. It can be a counsellor at INTERCEDE.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline can help. We are a confidential telephone service. You don't have to say your name when you call. A trained counsellor or volunteer is on the line 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you experience the forms of abuse written above, you have a right to be heard, to be believed. You have a right to stop from being hurt. The movement to stop violence against women is growing and getting stronger. As women we have a right to live without violence or the fear of it. As more of us speak out, our message is getting heard.

by Lynda Davies

(Ms. Davies is Executive Director of Assaulted Women's Helpline. She spoke about sexual harassment in the workplace during INTERCEDE's October 1st meeting).

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR PAY FROM OCTOBER 1ST

	Monthly (12/year)	Bi-weekly (26/year)	Weekly (52/year)
Gross Wages	\$953.34	\$440.00	\$220.00
Deductions			
Room & Board	\$273.00	\$126.00	\$ 63.00
Income Tax	\$112.75	\$ 51.50	\$ 25.75
CPP	\$ 15.30	\$ 7.06	\$ 3.53
UIC	\$ 18.59	\$ 8.58	\$ 4.29
Net Pay	\$533.70	\$246.86	\$123.43

Note: Gross wages are based on a 44-hr. work week with no overtime. Board is calculated at the rate of \$1.90/meal or no more than \$39.90/wk. Room is calculated at the rate of \$23.10 for a private room and \$11.55 for a shared room. Income tax deductinos are based on Code 1 exemption only. If you have dependents, your tax deduction should be lower.

INTERCEDE'S NEW SET OF OFFICERS

At its first meeting, the new Board of Directors elected a set of officers for 1989-1990.

Mary Jarrell, a lawyer on her second term in the Board, was elected President. Vice-Presidents are Joyce Stanford and newly-elected Rosemary Seymour. Thelma Coolen and Carmencita Hernandez were elected secretary and treasurer respectively.

Meanwhile, the search for a new staff counsellor at the service unit was advertised in five community newspapers and applications have been received and interviews arranged. Pending acceptance, the new staff counsellor will be announced in the next issue.

The policy committee composed of Sedef Arat-Koc, Thelma Coolen and Celia Tababan has prioritized a project to review the Foreign Domestic Movement Program. This committee will present a study at the end of November based on which changes will be proposed to the current program bringing domestic workers to Canada. Ms. Koc who is leading the research with the assistance of INTERCEDE coordinator, Fely Villasin, is hoping all recipients of the questionnaire enclosed in this newsletter will respond promptly to facilitate meeting the November deadline.

According to Ms. Jarrell, "INTERCEDE is eager to propose just and reasonable alternatives to the FDM program in order to minimize the hardships and abuses domestic workers have been facing. I am encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by the new set of Board members to enhance INTERCEDE's role as a principal advocate for domestic workers".

COCO'S CALENDAR

Going home for the holidays?

If you are planning to go back to your home country for the Christmas holidays, you risk losing your visitor's visa and you are risking your chance to come back to Canada.

Before coming back to Canada, make sure to contact the Canadian consulate in your home country and apply for re-entry to Canada. It is important for you to bring all your important documents such as your passport with the existing visa stamped on it, your work permit and a letter from your employer stating that you are currently employed and intend to resume employment after your vacation.

Release letters...again

Again, more and more foreign domestic workers are being required to produce release letters from their last employer when they go to Immigration to report for permission to seek another employment. If you are intending to leave your employer or if you have been terminated, contact the INTERCEDE service unit at once.

New information about OHIP

OHIP premium payments will be eliminated effective January 1, 1990. This means that the next OHIP bill you get may be the last. After March 31, 1990, as long as you remain a resident of Ontario, your coverage will be valid without further premium payments.

Your existing OHIP card and number will remain unchanged. Be sure to inform the Ministry of Health in writing if there is any change in your family status or in your address. When writing to the Ministry of Health, be sure to refer to your OHIP number.

For questions, you may call the following numbers:

Toronto Central	482-1111
Toronto East	965-1000
Mississauga	275-2730
Hamilton	521-7100

Let's Dance

On Sunday, November 26, 1989, INTERCEDE members will be holding a dance at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, starting from 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are at \$5 and there will be a cash bar. Enjoy!

By Columbia Diaz

We wish to thank the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Ministry of Immigration (Canada)

the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) and Secretary of State (Women's Program) for providing our core funding.

We also wish to thank The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture (Ontario), the City of Toronto, and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto for their continuing support.

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Time: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Place: 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ont.
Telephone: (416) 324-8751

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