

Prepared by:
Federation of Women Teachers'
Associations of Ontario

Women in ED 214
crisis



Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Problems of Women in Crisis

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Introduction

It is becoming increasingly evident that the problem of the physically or mentally abused woman is of far greater magnitude than had been previously imagined. The shelter and counselling provided to a woman caught in an untenable situation is of vital importance. Shelters and transition houses are located throughout Ontario and they provide essential services to battered women. Often, they are the only support for women who can no longer cope and are unable to convince anyone else of their need for assistance. 14

Women's centres, depending as they do primarily on private funding and charitable donations, exist at all times on the brink of insolvency. At the time of this writing, there is little indication that the situation will change in the near future.

As women teachers we are concerned because every classroom is a microcosm of the society in which we live. The negative influences which affect society also affect the students we teach. Abuse of a parent affects not only the child in that family, but also the other students in the class. As an organization of professional women teachers, FWTAO appointed a committee to inquire into the many aspects of the problems of women in crisis. The summary included in this report was developed by the committee members after reading support materials on the subject, interviewing crisis centre personnel, lawyers, police and doctors. An extensive discussion with Linda MacLeod, author of *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle* provided invaluable information.

Women in crisis, for the purposes of this report, include those who are battered, raped, abandoned, separated, divorced, widowed, or suicidal, since all of these women would need the services available from women's crisis, counselling and referral centres. Statistics about wife battering included in Linda MacLeod's book provide facts about battered wives on a Canada-wide basis. The report was based on the premise that for every case that is reported, 12,000 in 1978, there are many that are unreported. It is probable that in one in every ten households in Canada, wife battering is a fact of life. Teachers could conclude that of the 30 sets of parents interviewed during any school year, at least three mothers could be victims of abuse.

In a recent news article dealing with the need for funding to assist rape crisis centres, Christie MacCallum of the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre reported that 600 victims turned to the centre for help in 1979. In an article appearing in the *Toronto Life* magazine in August, 1974, it was estimated that for every reported rape case, there are ten unreported. MacCallum also states: "... in some centres across Ontario, incest forms 50 per cent of rape caseload." By implication, teachers could conclude that in any school year they will encounter at least one mother or student who has been a rape victim and at least one student who is a victim of incest.

Who are the victims?

Wife battering and rape do not occur only in certain geographical locations. They occur in all parts of Canada, in both urban and rural settings. Similarly, age is not a determining factor. While 62% of the reported cases of wife battering occurred among women between the ages of 20 and 40, women both above and below that age were represented in Linda MacLeod's research. Wife abuse also cuts across socio-economic barriers. While women from lower socio-economic backgrounds turned up more frequently at transition houses, it does not mean that middle and upper income women are not battered. It is only that sometimes women who have money may have a broader network of friends and relatives in a position to offer immediate help, and may be able to afford medical help or psychological assistance. Even a woman whose husband is well-off could find herself penniless in an emergency if the family finances are tightly controlled by her husband.

Importance to teachers

The significance of these conclusions for educators is two-fold. First, teachers must be aware of the effects of family violence on the children they teach, and use their awareness to provide the best possible support for these students. The children in a family where wife battering occurs are living in a home where tension is rife, and what is considered the normal routine of a homelife is non-existent. Meals and sleep are often interrupted by outbreaks of violence. If the mother seeks refuge in a transition house, the child will face the upheaval resulting from the loss of friends and a change of school. Since the stay at a transition house is usually short, these upheavals may occur more than once. A high degree of sensitivity and tact are required in order for teachers to assist these children.

Second, teachers must address the issue of the values and expectations of the young people they teach. Young girls must not grow up expecting that dependence, particularly financial dependence, will be a reality for them. Young boys must not continue to receive the message, even indirectly, that aggression and violence against women are acceptable.

It is clear that as women and as educators, we are in a unique position to have considerable influence in bringing about change.

This booklet contains the background information and recommendations of the FWTAO Ad Hoc Committee on Problems of Women in Crisis. Several problem areas have been identified throughout the report, and the recommendations which deal with the problems have been included following each section. All of the recommendations which would be addressed to a particular agency or organization have then been summarized at the end of the book.



What are the facts?

There is a commonly held belief that women who are abused, must deserve it, or like it, because they stay with their husbands. Linda MacLeod's research establishes that this conclusion is erroneous. Women stay in these situations because most of them have no viable alternative. Often they have no marketable skills to enable them to join the workforce. Social service institutions often do not provide access to retraining, and even where retraining would be a good choice, limited daycare facilities preclude taking advantage of such programmes. Without retraining, a woman is faced with the reality that leaving the battering situation with the children will mean severe economic hardship.

A woman who has been battered can expect little in the way of support from most existing avenues open to her. In the report of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women's Consultation on Wife Battering which took place in March 1980, titled "Wife Battering is Everywoman's Issue", a number of startling facts came to light.

When intervention occurs, that is, a woman decides to go to some professional, the interveners who are least sensitive to the woman's plight are members of the medical profession and Crown prosecutors. They are the least likely to accept the woman's account of her reality as valid. Police services were the most receptive to the interviewers and to the issue itself, followed by social workers, the local community and the hospitals, in order of accessibility.¹ While the particular study above was done in Quebec, talks with local professionals bore out this trend. Professionals still tend to see wife battering, not as a major social problem, but as an individualized family upset, where the wife's claim, much as in rape, must be proven valid. Yet of all reported cases of domestic violence, 10 per cent is child abuse, 16 per cent is abuse of various other family members, and 72 per cent is wife battering. Many organizations are now pressing to change the term to "wife assault," to clearly distinguish it as a crime.

Similarly, a woman who has been raped faces traumatic interactions with police, medical personnel and lawyers when she reports her experience. Christie MacCallum in an interview with Louise Brown of the Toronto Star states: "No rape crisis centre means nowhere for a victim to turn for counselling, and

without early help, victims run a high risk of psychiatric problems within five years of being raped" and "I can't tell you how many women who trust us would rather die than go alone to hospital for the painful two-hour gynaecological examination or the gruelling questioning by police, which can last up to eight hours."

Because of a lack of understanding on the part of some professionals, the need for crisis centres and transition houses becomes obvious. They provide the support and understanding which is not available elsewhere. While some of the workers in transition houses and crisis centres may be volunteers, their understanding of the problems of women is perceptive and supportive. They also assist victims to cope with the complex pressures met during any legal process.¹⁵

The danger of allowing too much intervention and control to be placed in the hands of bureaucrats is also described in "Wife Battering is Everywoman's Issue". One shelter in Ontario has total government funding and is run wholly by the municipality. Whereas this has solved the monetary problem, other equally distressing problems have developed. The women who organized the house have lost all control over its operation. They say it has become bureaucratic and inflexible. There is now no child care programme and no child oriented equipment. An integral part of most transition house programmes is the opportunity for women to share in the decision-making process and the running of the house. Such participation is no longer possible at this house. As well, women from towns and villages surrounding this municipality can be accepted, but because the shelter exists, no others can be built in the area.

At least in that community, there is a shelter. Of the twenty-three transition houses listed in *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle* only four are in northern Ontario; two in Thunder Bay (one restricted to Native women); one in Kenora; one in Sault Ste. Marie. The rest are in southern Ontario. Of these, 12 are located in major urban centres: Toronto; Ottawa; London; Windsor; Kingston and Hamilton. The need for assistance to rural women is apparent.

¹ *Wife Battering is Everywoman's Issue* — a Summary Report of the CACSW Consultation on Wife Battering — March 5-7, 1980. p. 15.

Funding

All crisis centres and transition houses operate on a shoestring. There can be no question of the mismanagement of funds since there is precious little money to be managed. Funding is a combination of government funding and private donations. The overall government funding source is the *Canada Assistance Plan* (CAP) which is intended to support these services with 50 per cent of costs being borne by the federal government and 50 per cent by the province. In Ontario, it is not handled in that fashion. The Ontario government encourages municipalities to set up and fund these programmes. Because municipalities often do not have the money, or have other priorities, they are reluctant to support the establishment of women's hostels or transition houses.

The CAP grants that are available are heavily tied into the welfare system. As a result there are more problems. In order to qualify for admission to a hostel or transition house a woman must first be eligible for welfare. However, in determining a woman's eligibility for welfare, the "family income" is considered and so a woman whose husband is well paid will not qualify for assistance, and cannot be admitted. Further, the funding available through the Canada Assistance Plan, which is referred to as a "per diem allowance" is not intended to support the house but simply to pay for the room and board of the woman. The "per diem" rate is negotiated for each house individually and varies widely from region to region. It can be as little as \$2.80 in one house or as high as \$18.20 in another. The average is about \$13.00 per woman per day. Obviously, repairs and capital expenditures for furniture or toys cannot be covered by such grants.

In addition, CAP grants are not made to all centres. First the need must be demonstrated. The rate is based on the number of women using the facility over a given period of time. The observation period is usually short, often a matter of only several days, and it is difficult for the centres to establish a realistic picture of the use of the facility in such a short time.

Finally, the effects of inflation are cutting into both the houses' ability to "make do" and the size of the private donations received. While charitable foundations such as the United Way have made donations, there is an uneasiness about their involvement in the future. There is a tendency for the United

Way and other agencies to subsume wife battering among other areas of domestic violence such as alcohol abuse, child abuse and juvenile delinquency. Their emphasis tends to be on emergency shelters rather than on specific "transition" houses which will support women and assist them in learning new job skills and becoming independent. It minimizes the recognition of wife battering as a problem on its own.

In short there is no regular source of financial support for women's hostels and transition houses. The following recommendations address the desperate need of the transition houses and crisis centres for financial support.

I Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario

- i) That \$5,000 be set aside in the budget to be available to assist women's crisis centres on a first come basis at the amount of \$250 per request.
- ii) That \$4,000 be set aside in the budget to be available to assist in the establishment of new women's crisis centres; the \$4,000 to be available to each region on an equal basis (i.e. \$800/region).
- iii) That the FWTAO Directors ensure that WTA Presidents are aware of the availability of funds for women's crisis centres and encourage the implementation of the Recommendations for WTA's which are included in the report of the Women in Crisis Committee to the August 11, 1980 meeting of the Board of Directors. (*Recommendations II i) to vi*).
- iv) That a report about the availability of funds for women's crisis centres be included in the *Newsletter*.
- v) That the donation from FWTAO to a women's crisis centre be presented directly to the centre and that the WTA be encouraged to make a similar donation.
- vi) That donations from FWTAO and WTA's for women's crisis centres be presented personally to representatives of the women's crisis centres at a meeting with appropriate publicity to promote awareness within the community of the need for such facilities, and their need for financial assistance.

II Women Teachers' Associations

- iii) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to make donations to women's crisis centres from their funds to supplement any donation provided by FWTAO; that, if a woman's crisis centre does not apply for a donation from FWTAO, or is unable to receive one, the WTA consider a more extensive programme of financial assistance.
- iv) That FWTAO recommend that WTA's encourage members to assist local women's crisis centres by volunteering to contribute their time on a regular basis.

IV Ontario Government

- i) That FWTAO urge the Ontario Government to match grants available to women's crisis centres from the Canada Assistance Plan, and not require municipalities to bear the entire financial burden of supporting such programmes.
- ii) That FWTAO request the Ontario Government to provide start-up funds for new women's crisis centres upon application; that such funds reflect the increased costs resulting from escalating interest rates, increases in the cost of real estate and increases in the cost of living; and that such applications be dealt with promptly in recognition of the urgency of need for women's crisis centres.
- iii) That FWTAO request that the Ontario Government direct the Ministries of Health and Community and Social Services to develop a system of co-ordinated support services including counselling and therapy, for victims of violence against women in all areas of Ontario. Special consideration should be given to the other members of the victim's family, especially children, who may be in need of counselling services when a woman is a victim of abuse.

The legal system

Linda MacLeod states: "Laws to protect wives who are battered are in fact technically in place, but accepted legal procedures and exceptions written into the law to protect the unity of the family make convictions virtually impossible and reinforce the wife's isolation and dependence."² As well, there is a reluctance on the part of the police and social service agencies to interfere in cases of wife battering. Should the case get to court, in fact, the onus is on the woman to "prove" her case. Of the legal avenues which are open to a woman who has been battered, none afford her immediate protection.

"Technically a woman who has been battered has five main legal options. Three of them are under federal jurisdiction. Under the criminal code, she may charge her husband with assault, or apply for a peace bond, and under the Divorce Act she may divorce him on grounds of physical cruelty. Her fourth and fifth options — applying for an injunction or for an ex parte interim order — fall under provincial jurisdiction."³

Should a woman intend to pursue any of these options, she will need advice and assistance throughout the procedure. Personnel at crisis centres are willing to provide that kind of unique support. Some of the pressures included in the process are described in "Wife Battering is Everywoman's Issue".

"Immigration and family laws protect the family unit and the man as head of the household at the expense of the women and children in the family. Even the interminable delays and adjournments possible under our court system are frequently used by irate husbands to force their wives to request that charges be dropped."⁴

Similarly, in rape cases, from a women's initial report to the police through to the court case, our legal system places the onus of proof on the victim. The response from members of the legal profession can be less than supportive, and can include an investigation of the woman's character and past behaviour. A woman faced with such attitudes and a complex legal procedure may be easily dissuaded from pursuing justice.

The following recommendations address the need for the Ministries of Health and Justice to improve support for women in crisis.

² *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle*, Linda MacLeod, Canadian Government, January 1980, p. 41.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Wife Battering is Everywoman's Issue* — p. 6.

IV Ontario Government

- v) That FWTAO urge the Ontario Government to direct the Ministry of Health to provide in-service programmes for doctors, nurses and other hospital staffs to assist them in
 - i) identifying and treating victims of violence against women, and
 - ii) making appropriate referrals to women's crisis centres and counselling services.

VI Federal Government

- i) That FWTAO urge the Ministry of Justice to develop guidelines dealing with how to respond in cases of wife battering and other violence against women for judges, crown attorneys, lawyers and police so that an effective system of justice will be available to women.
- ii) That FWTAO urge the Ministry of Justice to develop awareness programmes for judges, crown attorneys, lawyers and police (provincial, municipal and RCMP) to reinforce the guidelines dealing with how to respond in cases of wife battering and other violence against women and to increase the understanding of such personnel about the extent of the problem of violence against women, and appropriate ways of assisting the victims.



Social and community response

While it may be tempting to place the blame completely on government for lack of support for women in crisis, the response of society and the community at large has not yet caught up with the realities of the situation. Most communities do not provide adequate child care facilities to enable a woman to gain some independence. The few that are available tend to be geared to preschoolers, ignoring the needs of the six to twelve year olds. They are usually operated on a relatively rigid time-line, precluding the possibility of shift work. And of course there are far too few of any kind.

Retraining, employment and housing facilities rarely meet the needs of women adequately. Too many barriers and bureaucracies must be contended with to make some of these alternatives workable. Public awareness is growing, but old ideas die hard. There are still far too many people, both men and women, who in some way blame the victim.

Friends, family, the legal and medical profession often try to persuade the woman to remain and "make a go of it" or "to try harder". Often the women themselves are reluctant to talk about their problems. There is a tendency to make excuses for the abusive man.

Some members of the medical profession are not always supportive. Doctors do not question or report suspicion of abuse on a regulated basis. Too often the medical practitioner tranquilizes the woman so that she will be able to put up with a situation which should be seen as untenable.

In other words "support" agencies frequently require that the woman change herself rather than her situation. Often, the transition house is the only place where a woman in crisis can receive unequivocal support.

Recommendations to the Ontario Ministries of Health and Community and Social Services as well as to FWTAO and our members address the problem of public education.

I Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario

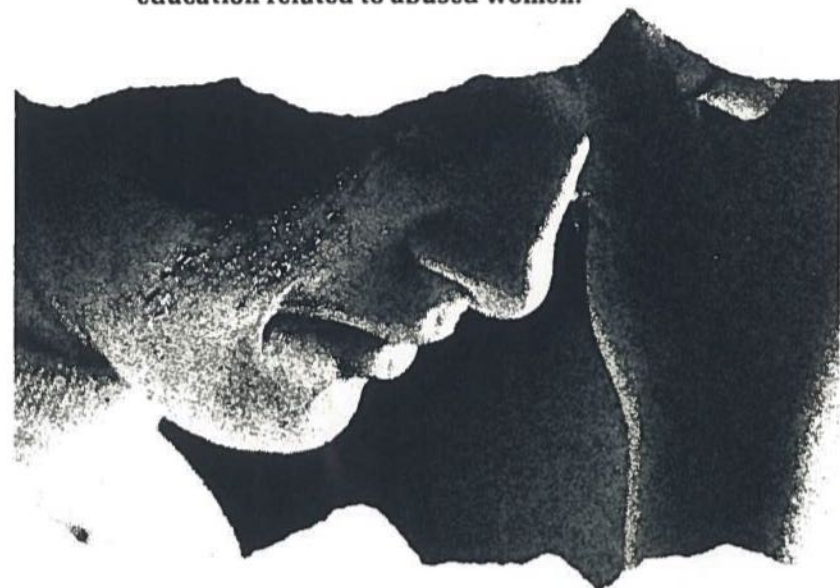
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II Women Teachers' Associations

- i) That WTA's be encouraged to provide workshops to increase the awareness of their members of the problems of violence in the lives of women. Resource persons from women's crisis centres, transition houses, community and social services and the medical and legal professions could be used.
- v) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to initiate contact with municipal officials and other women's groups in their community to publicize the need for women's crisis centres, and to assist in the establishment of such centres where they do not exist.

IV Ontario Government

- iv) That FWTAO urge the Ontario Government to direct the Ministry of Health and/or the Ministry of Community and Social Services to develop a programme of public education related to abused women.



The concept of women as dependents

Battering and rape can happen to women of all age groups and educational backgrounds. If there is a common denominator, it is the cycle of dependence which has intentionally or unintentionally been forced on women who see no defence and no alternative.

The concept of women as "victims" in these cases results from the continued perception of women as "dependents". Women are often unable to defend themselves physically against battering or rape because they have not been trained to do so. Some are unable to extricate themselves from a violent family situation because they do not have any alternative. They have not been socialized to expect that they will have to support themselves and their children. Their educational background often does not provide them with the training necessary to get a job. They are unaware of their legal rights and unaccustomed to taking the initiative. Therefore they are ill equipped to defend themselves and their rights.

Recommendations to the Women Teachers' Associations, Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Ministry of Education and to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission address the problem of women as victims and dependents.

II Women Teachers' Associations

- i) That WTA's be encouraged to provide workshops to increase the awareness of their members of the problems of violence in the lives of women. Resource persons from women's crisis centres, transition houses, community and social services and the medical and legal professions could be used.
- ii) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to plan for and provide workshops on Professional Activity Days for all staff that would directly or indirectly relate to the problems of women in crisis:
 - e.g. self-defense in physical education
 - career guidance — women's expectations for the work world
 - history of women
 - role of women in modern society
 - women as portrayed in the media, etc.

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III Ontario Teachers' Federation

- i) That FWTAO request that the Women's Rights Committee of OTF develop recommendations for all affiliates dealing with the development of in-service programmes for all teachers. Such programmes should address the emotional, societal and career expectations of girls in the educational system, and provide the skills which will minimize their perception of themselves as dependents.
- ii) That FWTAO suggest that recommendations developed by the OTF Women's Rights Committee include methods for dealing with personal and career aspirations of women in education throughout the curriculum.

V Ministry of Education

- i) That FWTAO commend the Ministry of Education for the plans announced in *Ontario Education, Spring 1980*, for a "Provincial Review", a province-wide study to assess the level of implementation of its curriculum policies on sex-role stereotyping in guidelines such as *The Formative Years, Intermediate History, Intermediate Guidance, Senior Guidance and Senior Family Studies*.
- ii) That FWTAO request that the timetable of the visits of the Ministry personnel involved in the Provincial Review of curriculum policies on sex-role stereotyping in Ministry guidelines be widely publicized so that all levels of school board personnel may provide input during the information gathering process.

VII Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission

- i) That FWTAO recommend that the CRTC develop guidelines for radio and television programmes to prevent the portrayal of domestic violence, in any form, as being acceptable.
- ii) That FWTAO request that the CRTC develop guidelines for commercials which
 - a) prevent the portrayal of women as objects
 - b) eliminate the exploitation of the sexuality of women and children
 - c) ensure the recognition of basic human dignity in all interactions between people in commercials.
- iii) That FWTAO recommend that the CRTC establish a committee similar to the pre-clearance committee for advertising directed to children and for feminine hygiene products to evaluate and rule on the acceptability of programmes and commercials according to the guidelines which the CRTC has developed.

The effect on children

The child who lives in a home where wife abuse is occurring cannot help but be affected. The child grows in an environment where violence against women is acceptable behaviour and often is psychologically and physically abused as well. Indeed, many abused women do not seek help until they see a clear threat to their children. Children of abused women live in a state of confusion. Their natural sense of justice tells them that the physical abuse of their mothers is wrong, but the constant exposure to the reality could lead them to conclude that the fault lies somehow with the victim. The child sees the mother essentially inactive in her own defense. The society around the family does not appear to be moving to intervene and support the mother. Recent studies have shown that children who grow up in homes where violence is commonplace tend to become abusers themselves.

Should a mother decide to leave a battering situation, the child must adjust to the new surroundings. Schools are inadequately prepared to deal with children during this period of upheaval. Training for teachers has not been available, perhaps because of lack of awareness of the magnitude of the problem. Clearly, educators must become aware of, and learn to meet, the special needs of children in these situations.

There is an obvious need for the teachers' recognition of the special problems of students who are victims of rape and incest.

II Women Teachers' Associations

- vi) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to provide in-service workshops for teachers to familiarize them with the special needs of children housed in women's hostels or transition houses.

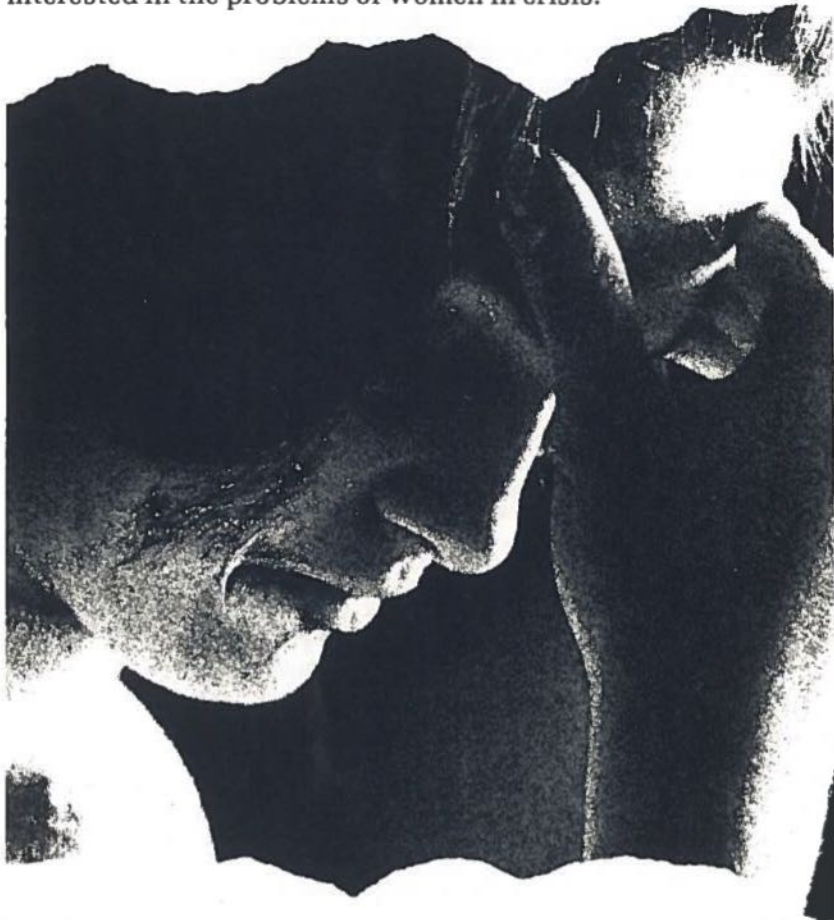
V Ministry of Education

- iii) That FWTAO request that the Ministry of Education require that school boards provide liaison teachers to assist children housed in women's hostels or transition houses; such staff would arrange liaison between the child's home school and the staff in the school in which the child will be temporarily placed.

Conclusion

The problems of wife abuse and rape strike at the very core of the feminist issue. No matter how many gains women make in the working world, no matter how much social freedom is gained, as long as wife abuse and rape are regarded, even marginally, as acceptable, little has been gained. Women are still relegated to the role of "chattel" to be dealt with as seen fit by the man. As long as society is prepared to equivocate about the physical and mental abuse of a woman, equality is merely a word with no meaning.

The recommendations which have been incorporated in this report were passed by the Board of Directors of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario. They are included in this document for information as possible action for other groups interested in the problems of women in crisis.



Recommendations

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- i) That WTA's be encouraged to provide workshops to increase the awareness of their members of the problems of violence in the lives of women. Resource persons from women's crisis centres, transition houses, community and social services and the medical and legal professions could be used.

- ii) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to plan for and provide workshops on Professional Activity Days for all staff that would directly or indirectly relate to the problems of women in crisis:
 - e.g. self-defense in physical education
 - career guidance — women's expectations for the work world
 - history of women
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 - women as portrayed in the media, etc.
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- iv) That FWTAO recommend that WTA's encourage members to assist local women's crisis centres by volunteering to contribute their time on a regular basis.
- v) That FWTAO encourage WTA's to initiate contact with municipal officials and other women's groups in their community to publicize the need for women's crisis centres, and to assist in the establishment of such centres where they do not exist.
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- ii) That FWTAO suggest that recommendations developed by the OTF Women's Rights Committee include methods for dealing with personal and career aspirations of women in education throughout the curriculum.
 - e.g. career expectations — health, guidance
 - history of women — social science, history, geography
 - industrial arts and family studies
 - women in the work force — history, social science
 - parenting skills — family studies, health, values education
 - self-defense — physical education, health

We recognize that the provisions are there for the discussion of these issues within various Ministry of Education documents. We would like to see the Ontario Teachers' Federation develop strong recommendations to ensure that the guidelines are followed in all classrooms.

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- i) That FWTAO urge the Ontario Government to match grants available to women's crisis centres from the Canada Assistance Plan, and not require municipalities to bear the entire financial burden of supporting such programmes.
- ii) That FWTAO request the Ontario Government to provide start-up funds for new women's crisis centres upon application; that such funds reflect the increased costs resulting from escalating interest rates, increases in the cost of real estate and increases in the cost of living; and that such applications be dealt with promptly in recognition of the urgency of need for women's crisis centres.
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- iv) That FWTAO urge the Ontario Government to direct the Ministry of Health and/or the Ministry of Community and Social Services to develop a programme of public education related to abused women.
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- ii) That FWTAO request that the timetable of the visits of the Ministry personnel involved in the Provincial Review of curriculum policies on sex-role stereotyping in Ministry guidelines be widely publicized so that all levels of school board personnel may provide input during the information gathering process.
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VI Federal Government

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- iii) That FWTAO recommend that the CRTC establish a committee similar to the pre-clearance committee for advertising directed to children and for feminine hygiene products to evaluate and rule on the acceptability of programmes and commercials according to the guidelines which the CRTC has developed.

Bibliography

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