

Spring 1992

Friends of Interval House Newsletter

The issue of Violence Against Women is on people's minds. It is on my mind. The Federal government has directed a panel to travel across this country to hold public meetings in which this very issue will play centre stage.

The public is asking for answers. Why must so many women (one in ten) suffer at the hands of their partners? Why do men violently strike out at the women they are sharing their lives with? What makes them do it? How can we stop this war against women?

For many people these questions seem impossible to answer. For the women who are victims of violence, these questions haunt them. To begin this probe, I believe, we need to look at the various myths and untruths our society holds about violence against women.

MYTH: Women ask to be assaulted - they provoke violent behaviour.

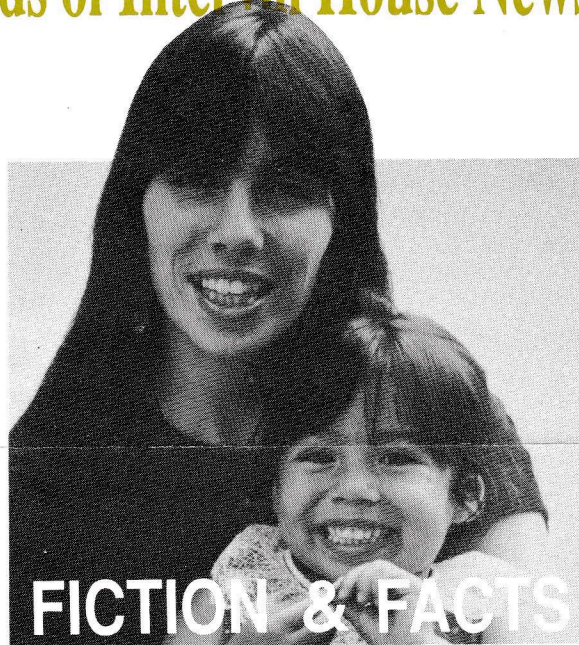
FACT: No woman asks to be assaulted. If a woman serves fried eggs on Thursday instead of a planned "steak dinner," this should not warrant an assault by her partner. Violence is a chosen response to a situation. A man who says "she made me do it," is placing the blame on his partner and is not taking responsibility for his violent actions.

MYTH: The husband who beats his wife is mentally ill.

FACT: Wife assault is too widespread to be the work of a few mentally ill men. "Research indicates that there is no higher percentage of mental illness among batterers than among the general population," says Dr. Suzanne Steinmetz. Violent, abusive behaviour is a learned response and a means to control.

MYTH: Domestic violence is a private matter and should be resolved by the family.

FACT: Violence is violence. It is a human right to live your life free from threats of violence and violent attacks. Women have the right to be safe from assaults by their partners, and society has the laws to protect this right. Violence is a criminal act.



FICTION & FACTS OF WIFE ASSAULT

BY SANDRA JANZ *Counsellor*

MYTH: Women who stay in abusive relationships do so because they like to be abused.

FACT: Resignation should not be equated with enjoyment. Many women who live through years of physical and emotional abuse become immobilized, convinced there is nothing they can do to stop the violence. They hope that their husband will change or wish to preserve the marriage for the children's sake. They begin to believe the constant abuse they hear, convinced that they are at fault, that it is "their problem." Often women have no place to go, they are economically dependent, and they are terrified of what could happen if they did leave.

MYTH: Alcoholism is the real cause of wife assault.

FACT: No. Alcohol could be a contributing factor but is not the cause. Some men who are alcoholics are violent whether they are sober or drunk - treatment for the alcohol problem alone does not stop the violence. Alcohol is best understood as something that often contributes to the circumstances of wife assault. If we believe alcohol is the real culprit we are denying the man's responsibility for his actions.

MYTH: Visible minority women, immigrant women, and women living in poverty are the ones being battered.

FACT: Women from all socio-economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds are victims of violence. Violence against women is a cross/cultural, cross/racial and cross/class crime.

These facts have been known to women's advocates for a long time. We are determined to remove these myths which act as barriers in our fight against violence against women.

Recently the Province of Ontario and Metro Toronto have initiated a two year long project to create a standard, and strong "protocol" for the handling of women abuse cases by all concerned. This means that once the protocol is established as procedure, the police, and the courts will bring these cases to court without the prejudices of the prevailing myths I've listed. Often, in the past, juries and judges have believed these myths and have shown "sympathy" for the men on trial.

In December 1991, the longest sentence in Canada for spousal abuse was handed down in Scarborough. A man, who pleaded guilty to aggravated assault, was given a sentence of 11 years. This sentence, compared with the usual 6 month sentence, is an indication that our justice system is responding to women's cries for help. At least in this case.

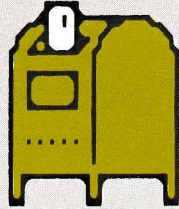
I think the public at large still has a difficult time equating violence against women with other kinds of violence. But women will continue their educational work and will continue to demand a response from the governments and the courts to deal seriously with this crime against women.

I am hopeful that our society can make the necessary changes in perception that will allow all women the protection they demand and the security to practice the rights that are theirs. The right to live a life free from violence.

* I would like to acknowledge Education Wife Assault's booklet, "Working with Assaulted Immigrant Women" by Moica Riutort and Shirley Endicott Small as resource materials.

From The Letter Box . . .

Our donors respond



To all the staff at Interval House,

I just wanted to write and express my support, for the wonderful-horrible work you do, with words instead of just money. (Although my cheque is still enclosed; I know only money pays the bills.)

Every time I read the paper or your newsletter, about another woman raped, or beaten, or killed, I want to cry. Sometimes I do cry. And I want to help, but I discovered early on that I am not able to stand the strain of working directly with victims/ survivors of violence.

I was working late one evening at a university women's centre

when a young woman came in and told me she had just been raped and asked me to help. Of course I did. But a few days later I was still so upset by the experience - her experience - that I resigned from the rape crisis centre's volunteer training program that I had recently joined.

I couldn't imagine myself sitting by a phone waiting to hear these horror stories again and again.

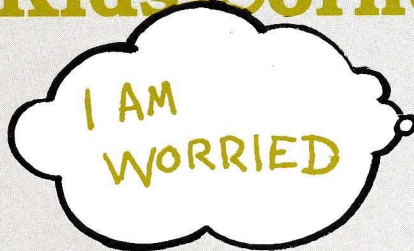
So now I confine myself to political lobbying and public education and making donations to organizations like yours.

And I wanted to thank all you wonderful women, who have the strength, courage, stamina and will to do what you do. Not all of us have what it takes; not even those of us who want to .

In sisterhood, Marci

P.S. In reading over this letter, I'm not sure if I wrote it more for me or for you. I know it made me feel better.

Kids Corner



I AM WORRIED

My Mom and sister and me came to this place, Interval House, not too long ago. My mom's real sad and I am worried about her. It is Mothers Day soon and now I'm worried because I don't have any money to get her something nice on Mothers Day to cheer her up. One of the ladies working here asked me why I looked so sad and I told her. And now I feel much better. Because we are going to have a secret party for all the moms here.

Just before Mothers Day, all the kids and a office person are going out to get flowers for them. I am going to get those little purple ones, crocuses, for my mom, she loves them. I am going to get lots for her. And there is going to be another big surprise. A big cake for all the mothers that says We Love You. I can't wait to see my mom's face. But I promised and so did my sister, Carol, to not say a word about it so we don't ruin the surprise. I want to tell mom but I can't. It's hard to keep a secret.

By Myles, 11 years old.

Our Services

Telephone distress counselling

Emergency Accommodation, food and clothing for 22 women and children fleeing family violence.

Counselling and group discussions to help women sort out tangled marital, legal, health, child care and housing problems.

Referrals to a wide range of community services and government agencies.

Referrals to knowledgeable and sympathetic lawyers who accept Legal Aid clients.

Accompaniment for women to go to court or return to the martial home for personal belongings.

Ex-resident outreach program which includes advocacy, counselling and support.

Children's services including individual and group counselling, referrals and advocacy.

In order to reach new people who would like to be part of Interval Houses work, we trade our mailing list with other likeminded groups. If you prefer not to have your name on the exchange list, please let us know. Just write us and arrangements will be made immediately.

Like wise, if you only wish to receive one mailing from us a year, just drop us a line.

