

**Wife Assault & Family  
Violence from the  
Native Perspective:**

Native

**Not Just A Woman's Issue**

Perspective

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Family Violence Introduction	1
Partner Assault	1
Canadian Statistics and Myths	2
Facts on Partner Assault	3
History	4
How and Why	4
Abusive Males	5
Why Do Some Women Stay	6
Where Can You Go for Help	7
Effects On Children	8
Healing	9
Help For Non-Native Counsellors	10
Elder Abuse	10
Intervention	12
Poem	13

## FAMILY VIOLENCE

If we try to guess when and how family violence came to be among the Native family we have to go back in history to the first eastern settlers that came to the new country. With their ideas on family life and status of women and children and their naïve belief that natives could not believe in the Holy Father, settlers began to re-educate the natives.

This began by showing that violence meant power. The most power was given to those that took control.

Throughout history this was taught to the Native people. As time went by families were separated and forced to learn ways foreign to them. They learned the ways of violence and in learning this they taught their children.

**Violence** is a **learned** as well as a **free choice** behaviour.

This did not happen over night. It took many generations for this to take place. Natives now are re-learning that violence is not an accepted way of life, and in order to heal, one must heal the entire family.

This booklet is dedicated to the families that have survived family violence. Who have taught their children a better way. To all the families in the future that will learn that a family is the most precious gift given to us.

### **PARTNER ASSAULT**

Definition: Partner assault or battering is defined in many ways. It is when a woman is repeatedly subjected to ANY type of intimidation by a husband, boyfriend or ex-lover. This takes on many forms, such as threats or physical force. The purpose is to control her behaviour by putting her in a state of fear.

### **FORMS OF PARTNER ASSAULT**

Physical Abuse: This is the easiest to identify. This form of assault includes pushing, shoving, choking, slapping, throwing objects and the use of weapons. Assault is committed when the abuser attempts or threatens to use force.

Sexual Assault: This starts with belittling women through sexual jokes, name calling and unwanted touches. Also includes ANY forced sexual contact and is often accompanied by threats of violence or actual violence.

Psychological or Emotional Abuse: This form of abuse induces the greatest state of **fear**. Often, the reason for this is that physical abuse has been committed making the threat of violence a FACT not a myth. Types of abuse include threats to oneself, threats against pets, family, friends, and the children, terrorizing the abused by playing with a knife or gun in front of her, isolating her from her family or friends. This form of abuse is designed to wear the victim down and successfully keep her in a state of fear.

## CANADIAN STATISTICS

Partner assault is **not** a recent phenomenon. Publicity may lead you to think it is on the rise, but in fact it's always been a hidden part of our community. Women are angry and tired of being victimized and are demanding that it become a public issue. A social problem that needs a remedy.

Partner assault is rarely an isolated incident. One study shows that women are beaten 35 times before they contact the police or shelter.

- One in ten Canadian women are victims of wife abuse.
- Violence against wives will occur at least once during two-thirds of all marriages.
- 25% of all wives are severely beaten during the course of their marriage.
- Two-fifths of all homicides in Canada are between spouses.

## MYTHS

Many myths surround the abused women; held not only by the public but by abused women as well. These misconceptions show that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the plight of the abused women. Some of these myths are listed below.

- Women deserve to be beaten.
- These women enjoy being beaten.
- A woman can leave the situation if she wants to.
- Battering is the result of a faulty marital relationship.
- Abuse does not happen in a loving relationship.
- Partner abuse is a lower class crime.

- The women asked for it.
- The children do not know what is going on.
- Abuse is only the women's problem.

These are only a few of the myths, unfortunately the list goes on.

## **FACTS ON PARTNER ASSAULT**

### **Partner Assault is a Crime**

Partner abuse cuts across **all** social, economic and religious lines.

The abuser is solely responsible for his own violence and abuse. No matter how much stress there is in a relationship, the abuser is not provoked to use violence. Once the abuser uses violence to cope with stress, he will rarely stop using violence spontaneously.

Most of these men view wives as their property; an extension of themselves that they can treat as they wish.

The children **do** know about abuse. Over time they begin to think it is normal behaviour. The children may become the abuser/abused. Some believe that the women provokes, torments and nags to the point that the man loses control. This blames the victim, not the abuser. The offender **MUST TAKE** responsibility for his actions.

Most women feel guilty and ashamed, isolated and alone with this problem and will thus be unlikely to seek outside help.

**No One Asks to Be Beaten!**  
**No One Deserves to Be Beaten!**

## **THE VICTIMS; A COMMON PROFILE**

Abused women do not fit in one personality type or economic background, but there are a few common traits that are the direct result of abuse.

The following characteristics are that of the abused partner. Please note that this is what the women have become. **Not** of what she was or could be again.

- Fearful
- She minimizes the abuse
- Isolated
- Sense of helplessness
- Blames herself, feels guilty
- Ambivalent
- Believes in the traditional female role
- Low self esteem
- Hopes for change
- Lacks resources or knowledge of same
- Has dependent children
- Is emotionally dependent on her spouse
- Loves her spouse, feels great loyalty to him

## HISTORY

In Canada before the 1968 Divorce Act, physical cruelty was not grounds for a divorce. An assaulted partner could claim alimony for cruelty but she had to prove that the violence was so extreme that it caused danger to her life, limb or health, bodily or mentally. As an Ontario justice commented in 1920:

“A husband may subject his partner, daily and even hourly, to such treatment as makes her life a veritable hell on earth as she is without remedy if she is robust enough to suffer it all without impairment on her physical health or her mentality.”

In 1965 partner abuse was put into the Criminal Code. A new “Rule of thumb” kind of law. It stated that a “man could go to jail for two years for beating his wife but only if he caused her “actual bodily harm”. In other words partner assault was legal provided it did not go too far.

The way to end this is for partner assault to be recognized as a **crime** against **society**, and have domestic violence regarded as seriously as violence between strangers. It is no longer a women’s private dilemma. It affects everyone as a whole. The time for change is now.

## HOW AND WHY

There are various factors involved in women becoming victims of violence.

Traditional Roles: Women who have been made to believe that their place is in the kitchen and the husband will look after them. Traditionally, women have been held responsible for the success or failure of the marriage.

Privacy of the Home: “My home is my castle” and “what goes on behind closed doors...” are beliefs that keep neighbours, family and friends and even some professionals from intervening in family violence. With this attitude they encourage women to struggle in silence and in solitude.

Victim Blaming: “If you hadn’t made him angry he wouldn’t have hit you.”

Statements such as this one blame the victim for the violence. It is time for the offender to face the fact that he alone is responsible for his actions **not** the victim. No woman or person ever deserves to be beaten regardless of the person she/he is.

## **ABUSIVE MALES**

There are many factors that encourage a man to use violence, but remember that it is by choice that he is violent. Factors include the fact that society has traditionally tolerated men using physical force against their wives, and supports numerous beliefs and values which come from the traditional male role.

Before abuse begins one must make choices. These choices are:

- the person must develop a desire to abuse.
- the person must overcome internal inhibitors to abuse.
- the person must develop opportunities to abuse.
- the abuser must overcome the partner’s resistance to being abused.

Once these choices have been made the “cycle of violence” begins. The first violent episode is played down, isolated, solved and defined as insignificant. The whole process gives the husband a growing sense of possessiveness, domination and control.

## **AN ABUSIVE MAN MAY...**

- Feel very jealous of other men and not want his partner to talk to men, even if they are friends. He may be convinced she is cheating.
- Become very angry about small things. eg. his partner is late,

or does not like what she is wearing.

- Try to isolate his partner from friends, family and other supports.
- Try to control by violence or threat of violence.
- Deny responsibility for his violence and blame his partner for the problem in the relationship.
- Feel sorry after an attack, but gradually forget promises to change.
- Believe very strongly in traditional male/female roles. He believes he has the right to control his partner and “keep her in line.”

## **Is there help for men that abuse women? YES!**

If you are a man who has trouble dealing with your anger, talk with someone.

You can join a group for men who abuse women.

Call your local hospital, shelter or social agency for help.

### **What can we all do?**

- Talk to others about partner abuse.
- If you hear or see a woman being hurt, call police.
- Let her know she is not alone.
- Listen to her and show her that you believe her.
- Help her get in touch with a shelter.

We should all care about partner abuse. It is **not** a private family matter.

## **WHY DO SOME WOMEN STAY?**

Our society makes it very hard for women to leave men who abuse them.

A woman may feel that she has to stay for reasons such as:

- She fears for her life. Her partner threatens to hurt her or kill her if she tries to leave
- She cannot afford to move out and support herself.
- She feels responsible for keeping the family together.
- She wants the children to grow up with their father.
- Relatives and in-laws want her to stay.
- He makes her feel guilty and tells her the abuse is her fault anyway.
- He takes away her confidence, so she doesn't think that she can make it on her own.
- He promises to never beat her again and he begs her to believe him.

It is **important** for her to remember that she cannot **stop** his violence.

He is **responsible** for his own **behaviour**.

- Talk to someone you trust.

**If you are a woman who is being abused:**

**It is not your fault!**

**Nobody deserves to be abused!**

**Abuse does not go away – it almost always gets worse.**

- Your doctor may be able to help.
- Call the “Assaulted Women's Helpline”  
1-866-863-0511, TTY 1-866-863-7868, or 416-863-0511
- Call a women’s shelter or women’s centre.

**If any person you talk to makes you feel that the abuse is your fault, keep trying until you find someone who understands.**

## **WHERE CAN YOU GO FOR HELP?**

Shelters for Women and Children: A shelter is a safe place to rest and plan for your future. You and your children can stay there and get the help that you need. Your children can go to school.

**Shelters are free.**

**They are open 24 hours a day – 7 days a week.**

Even if you don’t plan to leave your home, you can call a shelter just to talk.

Police: It is against the law to physically assault someone. It is against the law to sexually assault someone.

**No one has the right to assault you.  
Not even your husband or boyfriend.**

**The police have a duty to help women who are being assaulted.**

Lawyers: You have rights. You can find out what they are. If you leave your husband or boyfriend you should get legal help. It is very important to get legal help if you have children or if you are not a Canadian citizen. A lawyer can give you advice about custody or immigration.

If you are in danger go with your children to a safe place **now!**  
You have the right to take your children with you. You can get legal help later.

## **EFFECTS ON CHILDREN**

Children who live in a home where the man shows violent or abusive behaviour to his partner live in an atmosphere of fear and brutality. Although children in abusive homes are not always the target of violence, they are affected by the violence they see or hear.

Witnessing the abuse of their mothers, they experience a variety of emotions. The children feel guilty when fights occur fearing that somehow they may have started it. They are angry at their father for hurting their mother, or they are angry with their mother for "putting up with it".

One fear is that they will become victims of assault. The fact is, that they often do become innocent victims.

This occurs when children attempt to stop the fighting or protect their mother.

Children may witness violence in any or all of the following forms:

- They may see the actual assaults against their mother, or they see the results of the assaults (bruises, cuts).
- They may not be in the same room during an attack on their mother, but they likely hear the fighting, verbal and/or physical.

Along with physical abuse, women report emotional abuse, which typically precedes the development of violence and is the most hurtful to them. Children are often witness to the degrading comments made to their mother by the abusive man. With this in mind, one can hardly advise a woman to stay in an abusive relationship for the sake of the children.

## HEALING

Where does one start? Throughout the booklet we have given facts about family violence and partner abuse. These facts are universal; they cover every culture and religion.

In 1983 it was discovered that the needs of Native women were not being met in mainstream institutions (shelters). As we now know, for both Native and non-native women, it is a last resort for them when they enter into a shelter.

It took six years of work to map out a program that would be culturally suited to Native women in shelters throughout Canada.

This framework allows each shelter to provide services required in its area.

The women that enter into shelters now have the choice of what is important themselves.

In keeping with empowering women, resources are available for Native women to meet their emotional, mental and spiritual needs and improve their physical health. As well as services in their native language and having Elders available for individuals to speak with, the healing process has been expanded to the entire community. This then allows the abuser to begin to heal also. This begins a process called community healing.

As in most cases the abused still cares very much for the abuser, and with Native Healing the entire family takes part in this process.

First: One must start with the abused. She must realize that the abuse is **not** her fault. That in order to heal the family she must begin with herself. Many of the traditions and in-depth healing comes from sweat-lodges with the Elders in the community. In addition other Native agencies become involved.

Second: Empowering the women in areas of self-esteem, education and building a healthy lifestyle for the whole family.

Third: Bring the family together to talk about the abuse. Please remember that counselling the family **must not** begin until violence in the home has stopped or the woman is safe from retaliation.

## **HELP FOR THE NON-NATIVE COUNSELORS**

Native women who enter into shelters that have no native workers will take their time to assess counsellors to see whom they trust.

Counsellors are not always aware of what the woman is doing and therefore try to overcompensate. One has to be aware that a Native woman has the same feelings as a non-native, but, she may not be as quick to express them.

Once options have been presented, she will most likely take time to carefully think out what she wants to do. Giving her time and space shows her the respect of her being.

In summary, respect for each Native woman's unique cultural experience is essential for a comfortable interaction with shelter workers. Keeping one's assumptions to a minimum and seeking information from her in a respectful manner is important. Allowing her time, space and the security of confidentiality will aid a Native resident in making the crucial decision about returning to or leaving her abusive relationship. Giving her enough information about community resources will assist her in using her survival skills to adapt to changes. Helping her to explore new sources of support to replace those lost because of the isolation will help build her confidence to make changes.

## **ELDER ABUSE**

The failure to meet important physical, social and emotional needs of older people.

Indicators of Elder Abuse:

"Any act or behaviour by a family member or person providing care (formally or informally) which results in physical or mental harm or neglect of an elderly person."

**Physical Abuse:** Willful, direct infliction of physical pain or injury. Denial of physical and health related necessities of life.

**Neglect:** Lack of attention, abandonment and confinement of the elderly by family members or society.

**Psychosocial Abuse:** Removal of decision-making power from the elderly.

Withholding of affection, social isolation.

Exploitation: Any situation involving the dishonest use of an elderly person's resources, such as money or property. Misappropriation of health care resources.

Profile of Typical Elder Abuse Victim:

- over the age of 75
- female/widow/single
- progressive physical and/or mental impairments
- denies abuse: reluctant to report
- increasingly dependent on abuser for physical/emotional needs/takes on role of the child
- socially isolated
- may feel abuse is deserved
- may have been abusive parent

Profile of Abuser:

- middle age
- daughter/son of victim
- experiencing stress: financial problems, medical problems, marital conflict, substance abuse, unemployment
- increasing demands of caretaking role depletes family resources
- resents role reversal with parent
- low self-esteem impairs impulse control
- may have been abused child

## **CATEGORIES OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Physical Abuse: Hitting, slapping, pushing, pulling hair, shaking, shoving, cutting, burning, sexual molestation, rape.

Indicators:

- unexplained – abrasions, bruises, bumps, welts, fractures, tenderness
- pain, bruising, bleeding in genital area
- shivering, cyanosis, lowered body temperature

Neglect:

- active
- passive
- withholding nutrition, fluids
- inadequate hygiene, personal care

- over medicated – drugs, alcohol
- under medicated
- abandonment

#### Psychosocial Abuse:

- humiliation
- dehumanization
- non-verbal abuse/silence
- verbal abuse: shouting
- withholding of companionship/love
- threatening elder with abandonment, physical abuse, institutionalization, withdrawal of love

#### Indicators:

- elder appears shamed
- elder has low self-esteem
- appears withdrawn, passive
- elder appears to recoil
- elder feels invalid guilt
- elder excluded from family gatherings, not permitted to have friends, visitors, to go to church
- elder appears depressed, hopeless, helpless

## **INTERVENTION**

**Legislation:** To establish legislative measures and policies which will protect the rights of elderly persons.

**Advocacy:** To represent the views of the elderly, to articulate their special needs. To foster an appreciation of the developmental stage of the elderly.

**Research:** To determine the causes leading to abuse. To develop a valid and reliable assessment tool.

**Education:** To increase public and professional awareness of the abuse problem. To further understanding of the aging process.

#### Prevention:

- Establishment of screening programs for elder abuse
- Medical intervention for treatment of injuries, treatment of abuser

- Develop plan of intervention to address elder abuse
- Family therapy involving elder, abuser, other family members
- Educational programs to teach effective caretaking roles using a problem-solving process
- Rehabilitation; assisting the elder to achieve their optimum level of health and safety. May involve permanent change to create a more supportive environment
- Rehabilitation of abuser; ongoing counselling, group support.

November 22, 1992

It sits and stirs, the damage done  
 Unaware, the body goes through life  
 Exhibits anger, sorrow and sadness

What does it mean?

How can I cope with it?

I look all around me

I see normalcy

I'm supposed to fit

But I can't

Instead I feel alienated and alone

I have so much to offer

But I don't know how to give it

How can I let others

Who may have experienced the same contradiction

Know that it's not their fault

When I don't know that myself.

- By Betty Guppy -

Creator - A prayer

"No bird soars too high

If it soars with its own wings"

Funded by: Ontario Women's Directorate

Reprinted with special permission from:

Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse 1997 and

the Mississauga Family Resource Centre Wife Assault and Family Violence Project

P.O. Box 370

Bind River, Ontario P0R 1B0

(705) 356-7800 | Toll Free: 1-800-461-2232

**Copies can be obtained from:**

Metropolitan Action Committee on  
Violence Against Women and Children

Phone: 416-392-3135

Toll Free: 1-877-558-5570

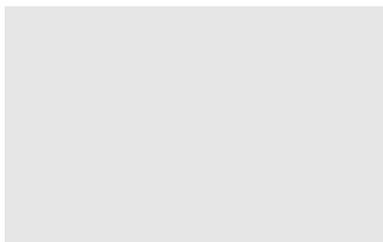
Fax: 416-392-3136

E-mail: [info@metrac.org](mailto:info@metrac.org)

[www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org) | [www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)

The views expressed herein are those of The Apo-Way-A-In Mississauga Women's Shelter and do not necessarily reflect those of the government of Ontario.

Your Local Resources



**Call 911 or your local police  
immediately if you are in danger.**

The Assaulted Women's Helpline  
(24 hours)  
1-866-863-0511 (toll-free)  
1-866-863-7868 (TTY)  
416-863-0511 (Toronto)

Sexual Assault/  
Rape Crisis Centres  
Go to [www.sacha.on.ca/other.htm](http://www.sacha.on.ca/other.htm)  
or look in your local telephone  
book.

Women's Shelters  
Go to [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca) or look  
in your local telephone book.

Sexual Assault  
Treatment/Care Centres  
Go to [www.satcontario.com/  
centres/centres.shtml/](http://www.satcontario.com/centres/centres.shtml/) or look in  
your local telephone book.

REPRINTED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT



The views expressed herein are those of The Apo-Way-A-In  
Mississauga Women's Shelter and do not necessarily reflect those  
of the government of Ontario.

Reprinted with the permission of:  
Apo-Way-A-In Mississauga Women's Shelter  
P.O. Box 370  
Blind River, ON P0R 1B0  
24 Hour Crisis Line: 1-800-461-2232 (toll free)  
Business Line: (705) 356-7800

**Copies can be obtained from:**

Metropolitan Action Committee on  
Violence Against Women and Children  
Phone: 416-392-3135  
Toll Free: 1-877-558-5570  
Fax: 416-392-3136  
E-mail: [info@metrac.org](mailto:info@metrac.org)  
[www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org) | [www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)

Action ontarienne contre la violence  
faite aux femmes  
Telephone: 613-241-8433  
Tlcp: 613-241-8435  
[aocvf@francofemmes.org](mailto:aocvf@francofemmes.org)  
[www.francofemmes.org/aocvf](http://www.francofemmes.org/aocvf)