

silence, denial and isolation. Elder abuse is extremely complex – it may involve physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, financial/material exploitation, neglect, spiritual abuse (ridicule, disrespect, using beliefs inappropriately, etc.) or some combination of these forms. The abuse and neglect of older adults can occur in the home and in community programs such as recreation centers and adult day programs. It can happen in institutions such as senior citizens' homes, hospitals, nursing homes and chronic care facilities.

What Can the Church Do? Religious congregations and their leaders help victims to address the spiritual questions that surface when abuse impacts their relationships and home. The language of the spirit speaks of healing and of connecting with God and with sisters and brothers in God's family. When the resources of the community are brought together with resources of the spiritual world, believers who have suffered abuse are given strength and support to combat even the greatest of fears. When clergy condemn abuse from the pulpit or in the privacy of their office, they bring hope and healing to those who have suffered. Survivors need to hear that abuse is always wrong and never part of God's design for healthy family living.

RAVE (Religion and Violence e-Learning) believes that every woman, man, teen, and child who looks to their faith community for assistance in the aftermath of abuse deserves to receive help that is compassionate, practical, based on accurate information, where SAFETY is a top priority. We deliver training and resources, immediate access to shelter contacts, as well as best practices (and pitfalls to avoid) to religious leaders and congregations through web-based sources accessed in clergy offices, internet cafes, seminary classrooms and churches around the world. We believe that churches and their communities are co-partners in responding to abuse and working together towards its elimination in every home and every congregation. To find out more about how you can be part of a coordinated community response to family violence and help bring hope and healing to victims of abuse, visit the RAVE website at: www.theraveproject.org



What is Abuse? Abuse is behaviour that shatters dreams and causes pain. Sometimes abuse involves physical violence like hitting, kicking or choking. Sometimes abuse involves name calling or harsh words that are meant to hurt. Sometimes abuse involves limiting or denying access to food, or money, or other family resources. Sometimes abuse involves demands for sexual activity. Abuse always involves responses that are meant to control, shame or humiliate another person through intimacy and shared experience. Peace and safety for all family members cannot exist when abuse is present.

How Common is Domestic Violence in Canada? In 1999, 30% of women currently or previously married had experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital partner. According to the 2004 General Social Survey, 7% of Canadian women in committed relationships reported spousal violence in the previous five years, with 21% of these 653,000 women reporting more than ten violent incidents and 44% reporting being injured as a result of the violence. 47% of female victims of spousal violence reported seeking formal help. 12% of these victims of abuse seek help from their churches.

Looking at the Data from Religious Leaders: Over the last 15 years, the Religion and Violence Research Team at the University of New Brunswick has collected data from more than 500 religious leaders concerning domestic violence. The next page summarizes their perspectives concerning abuse and provides a snapshot of their experiences working with victims and perpetrators:

From the responses of religious leaders, we learned that:

- Pastors believe that one in five couples in their congregation is violent;
- 9.3% of pastors have counseled five or more abused women in the last year;
- 83.2% of pastors have counseled at least one abused woman;
- 8% of pastors feel well equipped to respond to domestic violence;
- 31% of pastors report that they have preached a message on abuse;
 - 40% of pastors discuss violence in premarital counseling.



Looking at the Data from Church Women:

Data collected from over 500 church women concerning domestic violence provides a snapshot of their beliefs concerning abuse as well as their experiences related to working with other women who have been victimized.

- 95% of church women report they have never heard a specific message on abuse preached from the pulpit of their church;
- 58% of church women have helped an abused woman—one in four have offered her a bed for the night;
- 69.8% of church women have sought the help of another woman in their church regarding a family related problem;
- Many Christian women who have been violated do not feel that the term—abused woman—applies to them.

Some Canadian Statistics on Child Abuse:

- According to 122 police services, in 2003, children and youth under the age of 18 accounted for 21% of victims of

physical assault and 61% of victims of sexual assault, while representing 21% of the population;

- Parents represented 7 out of 10 family members accused of physical assault and 40% of those accused of sexual assault against children and youth;
- Rates of family-related sexual assault were highest for teenage girls, especially for young teenage girls aged 12-to-14. Among boys, rates of family-related sexual assault were highest for those aged 4-to-6;
- Over three in ten children who witness abuse are also physically abused themselves;
- Girls and boys are affected differently by abuse. Girls are more likely to internalize their response to violence, and experience, for example, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, low self-esteem and psychological disorders. Boys are more likely to externalize their response, displaying, for example, increased aggression, delinquency and spousal abuse.

How Can We Prevent Abuse? Teen dating violence can be a microcosm of family violence. Relationship patterns and personal identity construction developed during the adolescent and teen years set the stage for the future. If we want to prevent and eliminate family violence, we can help teens develop the skills needed to foster healthy dating relationships. Dating violence prevention programs should be part of a comprehensive approach involving partnerships with schools, government organizations, community agencies churches, parents and youth. Youth leaders play a vital role in educating teens about what love is and what love is not.

Facts on Elder Abuse: Abuse of older adults is not a new problem, but with increased awareness in our communities it is one that is coming out from behind the closed doors of

