

Nothing ?Domestic? about domestic violence

By SHERALYN ROMAN

November 25th was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. What follows it is 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, ending on December 10th with World Human Rights Day. On December 6th, it's the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, in remembrance of the 14 young women brutally murdered at l'Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal ? murdered simply because they were women. It is almost 2020 yet women remain relentlessly hunted, persecuted, brutalized, used and abused. Right here at home human trafficking is growing exponentially and just in the last 24 hours a video has gone viral of a man kicking a woman ? in full view of neighbours. When will enough be enough? When will we ever acknowledge that there is nothing ?domestic? about domestic violence and instead, call it for what it is, assault, assault with a weapon, rape and/or all of these plus murder. A systemic failure that allows women to be abused or murdered in their own homes and even out on the street, in full view of neighbours.

Did you know that over half of women in Canada report experiencing at least one act of physical or sexual violence? That violence against women knows no ethnic, cultural, monetary or educational boundaries? Any woman can be a victim, and the chances are that a woman you know and love has been or is now. Domestic violence affects your friend who is a teacher just as easily as your work colleague who may have just recently arrived in Canada from abroad. Young, old, persons with disabilities and the able-bodied, there is no one ?profile? of a victim. It's about power and control and it affects us all. What can we all do to stem the tide of violence? We can start by being honest about it and, as Status of Women Canada points out; listening to AND believing victims, speaking out and adding your voice to the call for action, intervening by finding a safe way to do so when you witness acts of gender-based violence and by acting ? lending your time, energy and input to organizations that are working to end violence against women.

There is a growing movement to have gender-based violence referred to in media reports as Femicide. This is defined as ?the killing of a woman or girl, in particular by a man and on account of her gender.? On the other hand, domestic violence is defined as ?violence or abuse by one person against another, in a domestic setting.? Certainly this is a broad umbrella term that allows ALL forms of violence to be investigated but murder is murder and if a woman is murdered by her partner ? perhaps referring to the act as Femicide will bring more attention to the issue and allow the full weight of the law to prevail and stronger punitive action to be taken. A must read article in MacLean's, written by Anne Kingston called ?We are the Dead,? notes that clarity of language is crucial to holding men accountable. In it, front line workers like Sophia Hladik ?reject terms like ?spousal assault? and ?domestic violence,? saying they veil the fact that, in almost all cases, it's men's violence against women.? (1) Further, as Elizabeth Leehy, a Professor of Law at U. Ottawa explains, ?Language can obscure, and minimize, she says: ?The more we use these euphemisms as opposed to ?women-killing' or ?femicide,' the easier it is to ignore and silence what is actually happening.?(2)

The problem isn't just here at home of course, around the world where cultural attitudes vary, domestic violence is often seen as acceptable within the confines of a marriage. A recent article in the Toronto Star pointed to police in France who, it's alleged, ?routinely ignore domestic violence calls.? I'm sure there are similar stories and quotes from around the world. We all need to do better. Perhaps you recall a recent case in Scarborough where a woman was hunted down and killed with a machete on the street in front of her own home. Sure we expressed shock but where was the outrage? Had that been a random attack, stranger on stranger, I venture to suggest the outrage factor would have been significantly louder and the calls for action more urgent. Instead there were a few ?tut tuts,? and some shaking of the heads and wringing of the hands but otherwise?.not much else. The woman's ex-husband had previously been charged with assault, charges for which he was later acquitted. At the time of the attack he was on a peace bond to stay away from his ex-wife. Still, she wasn't safe. Her name was Tharshika Jeganathan. We should remember her. Not as a victim of domestic violence but as a victim of murder, of femicide. It's been 30 years since the massacre at L'Ecole Polytechnique ? it appears we've changed very little.

1 & 2 <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/we-are-the-dead/>

*While I currently sit on the Board of Family Transition Place serving the Caledon/Dufferin Community, please note that the views expressed in this article are my own. If you need help or know someone who might, there are numerous resources available to you - including those of FTP. The 24 hour crisis line is 1-800-265-9178