

We need to work together to end gender violence

by Mark Pavilons

"No form of violence can ever be excused in a society that wishes to call itself decent." - Nelson Mandela

Gender-based violence is on the rise in our country and it's something that can't be ignored.

The stats are staggering and heart-breaking. I can't understand this dark aspect of the human psyche.

It can take physical and emotional forms, such as: name-calling, hitting, pushing, blocking, stalking/criminal harassment, rape, sexual assault, control, and manipulation. Many forms of this abuse are against the law.

It can happen between people in romantic relationships. It can happen in families, at work, and between friends and acquaintances and strangers. It often occurs in private places between people who know each other.

Anybody can be abused, no matter their background, identity, or circumstance. But women, girls, and gender-diverse people are at high risk of gender-based violence. Some are at even higher risks, due to the additional discrimination and barriers they face. This includes women with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women, trans and non-binary people, and women who are homeless or underhoused.

In Canada in 2022, 184 women and girls were violently killed, primarily by men. One woman or girl is killed every 48 hours, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2022.

StatsCan noted that more than 4 in 10 women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetimes. In 2018, 44% of women reported experiencing some form of psychological, physical, or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.

Research shows that women disproportionately experience the most severe forms of IPV, such as being choked, being assaulted or threatened with a weapon, or being sexually assaulted, according to the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics.

Unfortunately, our society has created terms like "intimate partner femicide." This is a term that should never have come to pass.

Females are at a much higher risk of homicide by their male intimate partners and women and girls are disproportionately killed by someone they know, namely an intimate partner or a family member.

In 2020, 160 women and girls were killed by violence. In 2021, 173 women and girls were killed by violence. In 2022, 184 women and girls were killed by violence.

Two thirds (65%) of people in Canada know a woman who has experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, notes the Canadian Women's Foundation.

Women are five times more likely than men to experience sexual assault and roughly 4.7 million women, 20% of all women 15 years of age and older report that they have experienced sexual assault at least once since the age of 15.

On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home. Out of the 4,476 women and 3,493 children staying in shelters on the snapshot date of April 16, 2014, 78% (or 3,491 women and 2,742 children) were there primarily because of abuse, according to Beattie and Hope Hutchins, Statistics Canada, 2014. As well, on any given

night, about 300 women and children are turned away because shelters are already full.

Rates of intimate partner violence experienced by rural women are five times higher than for rural men and 75% higher than urban women.

There were over 107,000 victims of police-reported intimate partner violence (IPV) in Canada in 2019. For 660 victims of IPV, a firearm was present. Women accounted for almost 8 in 10 victims of all IPV incidents and they were even more likely to be the victim in the 660 IPV incidents where a firearm was present, says Public Safety Canada, 2021.

It is estimated that, each year, \$7.4 billion is spent to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence alone.

Just recently, the provincial government announced up to \$19 million for 34 organizations to prevent and address gender-based violence in Ontario and across the country.

This funding will help these organizations prevent and address gender-based violence by strengthening their communities, building capacity, providing better support and resources, or conducting research. The collaborative spirit driving these initiatives embodies the essence of progress towards gender equality and a stronger, more inclusive Canada.

That's good news, but one has to wonder how we let something like this get so far, especially when we have detailed data for more than 10 years.

As a Boomer, who turned into a teen in the 1970s, this issue was never discussed. I can't say it didn't happen, but I would assume incidents were few and far between. I personally never heard of it.

We males were brought up with the directive that you never hit a woman.

So, what has changed in the last, let's say 20 years?

The late 1990s saw a growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion and the following decade saw increased efforts addressing race, gender, sexual orientation, promoting a more inclusive society.

With two decades of setting the stage for a healthier society, where did it all bog down? Why have things gotten so bad?

With the arrival of social media and smart phones, more people were embracing this new technology. Were they using it for good or bad? I don't know. Granted, it altered how we communicated, but with the rapid influx of information and awareness, there was no reason for an increase in hate and violence.

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