

## **Domestic abuse can come in several different forms**

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On the Anselma House website there is a definition of abuse. It reads: "Violence against women in an abusive relationship is the attempt to control using fear, violence, intimidation. Abuse is not just physical. It may also be sexual, emotional or psychological."

What we hear most about is domestic violence. The statistics are staggering and several organizations are working hard to help women who are victims of violence. This kind of abuse leaves visible scars, a black eye, which the victim might hide with sunglasses. Bruises on the arms that she might hide with long sleeves. Sometimes they are not successful in hiding the scars and friends and family notice and sometimes try to help.

People working in shelters say there are other forms of abuse that leave scars too. Invisible scars. We don't hear much about this kind of abuse because we are more likely to react to things we see. As a result most physically abused women come forward because other people see their scars.

The voices of people who advocate for the victims with invisible scars of abuse are as silent as those of the victims. I am by no means diminishing the terrible effects of physical violence, I'm just looking at other forms.

When it comes to the immigrant women who are victims of abuse there's a different dynamic. Some of them are sponsored by their husbands so they have no economic power. They start with a deficit in financial independence and the ability to get into any kind of self development.

Who is looking out for those of them who suffer in silence when every piece of information they have access to is filtered through their husbands? Many cultures have practices that make it a taboo to seek help outside the family unit.

I'm not saying immigrant women should throw away their culture just because they are in Canada. My point is that any practice that will make someone suffer for no other reason than to endure subjugation is not worth holding on to.

Do these women have rights? The law says they do. In the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, under Legal Rights it says, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice."

How does the law protect these women when they have no way of accessing the system?

On Sept. 17, 2007, at a domestic violence conference in London, there was a focus on immigrants. In her article in the London Free Press on Sept. 18, Jennifer O'Brien reported that "immigrant women are more likely to be victims of abuse than their Canadian counterparts," attributing the comments to a domestic violence researcher. Alfredo Marroquin, with Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, is quoted in the article saying, "The immigrant population is a very important component in Canadian society and we need to provide (newcomers) with the tools to end violence against women." That's encouraging.

The Neighbours, Friends and Family campaign is also an excellent resource and has a wealth of information on their website.

The women who are isolated due to language barriers are at the most disadvantage. If all the literature is in English they can't benefit from it.

There are specific places where brochures on abuse are placed and women can find them. Maybe we should put these brochures at more places and everywhere that immigrant women go to. For example the adult learning centres, and the various factories. Information is power. Knowing what to do and where to get help is part of the problem solved.

The agencies that handle these issues are doing great work. A mother's emotional and physical health is directly linked to that of her children. For every mother that is helped there is a child or children who will feel more secure and have better emotional health.

Does the help go far enough? Without financial independence the woman will only fall victim to other societal traps, like poverty, which has its own scars. They need meaningful financial independence for the long term.

As many immigrant women as possible should have access to information about the help that is out there through these agencies.

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