

May 4th, 2007

Incidents in which women are abused and even killed by their male partners are all too familiar. We routinely read about such cases occurring in this community, this province and across Canada.

In cases of murder, the deaths are typically preceded by increasing acts of aggression. In this city alone in 2005, Hamilton Police Services laid 1,396 charges against men in cases of domestic violence against women.

Just as disturbing as these incidents is the knowledge that in all cases of domestic violence deaths in Ontario in 2005, people close to the victims were aware of the escalating patterns of violence and did not intervene.

In its 2005 Report to Ontario's Chief Coroner, the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee noted that "In every case reviewed, family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and/or professionals had some knowledge of the escalating circumstances between the perpetrators and the victims. However, these individuals did not appreciate the significance of the situation, the information or warning signs available to them or what to do about it."

The committee's report went on to recommend that domestic violence education and awareness work be done in a culturally competent manner, using multiple strategies and approaches. They also noted, "domestic violence fatalities are not gender neutral events. When examining the sample of 100 cases, females were victims in 93 per cent of cases and perpetrators in only 6 per cent of the cases."

From this recommendation has come the Neighbours, Friends and Families Campaign, a project, initiated and funded by the provincial government.

Launched last summer by the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Sandra Pupatello, the campaign is a partnership between the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, at The University of Western Ontario.

The campaign includes an educational resource kit that community agencies can use to implement their own campaigns and a [Web site](#)

The informational materials outline what neighbours, friends and families can do to play a role in preventing woman abuse. It can be as simple as listening and helping an at-risk woman or abusive man link to community resources. Of paramount importance is that neighbours, friends and families keep themselves safe, by not placing themselves in a violent situation, calling the police in an emergency and otherwise the Assaulted Women's Helpline (1-866-863-0511) or local women's shelters for resources available in Hamilton.

As the Domestic Violence Death Review Report notes: "The Committee continues to hope that all jurisdictions will establish a process so that some day there will be a national understanding of and approach to reducing the tragedy of domestic violence. The greatest need continues to be educating all members of the community about the warning signs of domestic violence and the appropriate action necessary to prevent it."

Barbara MacQuarrie is co-director of the Neighbours, Friends and Families Campaign and community director of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.