



STOP MALE SEXUAL ASSAULT

Editorial

Until fairly recently, men who were victims of childhood sexual abuse, remained in the shadows of mainstream discourses of legislation and policy makers, service creators and funders, as well as service providers and front line support staff. Many men who were victims (a term with which most men do not associate) of sexual abuse were often youths under the age of sixteen. They often review their abuse history through the eyes of their adult selves, which often results in critical judgment of self, self-loathing, as well as a multitude of unanswered questions about identity and sexuality.

Research regarding the prevalence of males who have been sexually abused range from “1 in 6” ratio to as high as 18% of the male population. There is consensus that the number of men who report is extremely low. It is well known that victims of sexual assault feel shame, embarrassment and even guilt for having been targeted by a sexual predator. Many victims have reported that they prefer to keep the incident as private as possible; therefore these crimes remain underreported. It has been observed that men are more reluctant than women to disclose incidents of sexual assault and to seek help in recovering from the effects of such experience. For some men who have experienced such assaults, it is hard to even identify it themselves until many years later, especially if the perpetrator was a woman.

In the field of support services for adult victims of sexual violence, it has been well documented that men can also experience sexual abuse; however, we also know that the vast majority of people seeking help are women. Consequently, the majority of the services for people who have experienced sexual abuse in the geographic area of Southern Ontario and more specifically, in Peel, have been created and geared to serve-women. Some of these services can be adapted to serve men, however, it is important to acknowledge that a major shift is needed in the particulars of service delivery. One example is in language usage. It is common practice in the service provision for women who have experienced sexual violence to be identified as survivors or victims. This common practice can be a major deterrent for men seeking services as they tend to steer away from being identified as survivors or victims.

Young males who have been exposed to sexual abuse carry a burden that impacts all aspects of their development into adulthood and will permeate all aspects of their lives. As their lives intertwine with others, the residual fallout from their unwanted experience works in the shadows of their psyche. We need to assist men seeking services to grasp the impacts of the abuse especially on their sense of self.

Prevalence of Male Sexual Assault

Statistics provided by the Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program indicates that approximately one in six men will experience sexual abuse in their lifetime. Several population-based studies indicate that the prevalence of male sexual assault is between 0.8% and 11%, with some clinic-based research reporting rates as high as 18%. Other research suggests that 10 to 20 per cent of all males will experience some form of sexual abuse or sexual assault at some point in their lives. The true prevalence, however, may be much higher. That translates into thousands of Canadian boys and men being abused every year. However, the percentage of males who report, and there is significant evidence to support this, is considerably low. These groups include men who identify as gay or bisexual, those who suffer from mental health problems, those who are veterans, and those who are in prison or jail.

Statistics regarding male sexual assault indicate that adolescents are most often targeted for male sexual abuse; men are the perpetrators in the large majority of sexual abuse and sexual assault cases involving male victims. Despite popular belief, most male perpetrators identify themselves as heterosexual. They often have consensual sexual relationships with women. One of the main reasons for not reporting male sexual assault is the fear of being perceived as homosexual.



The Socialization of Males

It is undeniable that we have been living in patriarchal societies for many years now. Even the most modern and advanced societies of today are based on patriarchal archetypes of gender roles. So far, these archetypes have been a disservice to both men and women. They often impose unrealistic expectations about womanhood and manhood, creating confusion on both sides. The prototypical man is expected to be strong, detached, aggressive (both physically and in character), forward, a good provider, tough, and somewhat insensitive, among many other traits. This prototype idea limits the

scope of life experiences men are expected to have. Experiences of love, care, compassion, emotional attachment, sensitivity, sensibility, vulnerability and so on, are viewed as feminine in the mainly dichotomist value system of patriarchy. Needless to say, this is very limiting, in that it defines people's experiences by this binary understanding of masculinity and femininity, placed at opposing corners. It boxes individuals into a gender that dictates restrictive instructions on not only what to be and how to feel, but also how to respond, according to their gender. Opposed to what most people believe, these aspects of socialization in patriarchal societies put enormous pressures on men, when it comes to gender role performance. Men experience the burden of defining their maleness according to how closely they align themselves with the expectations placed on them. Moving away from those expectations causes them to question their own masculinity. Questioning one's masculinity leads to a negative impact on one's identity, one's sense of self, and even on one's gender identity, with devastating results.

What can we do about the pervasive effects of patriarchal ideologies that permeate our society and affect the way we socialize our boys? A possible solution is to use feminist theory. There is no question that feminist theory offers an alternative to the very restrictive patriarchal prescriptions of gender roles. Feminist theory, especially of the latest wave, breaks the rigidity of patriarchal ideology, bringing a lens of inclusion, intersectionality, and a more flexible viewpoint on gender roles and role performance.

Regional Services for Men Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse

Historically, feminist groups have pressured governments and policy makers to allocate funds for the creation of specific services for women focusing on survivors of physical and sexual abuse. This long, vigorous struggle encompassed years of lobbying, data collection, research, and trial and error before evidence-based services were established. Currently, there is consensus among service providers on what works when supporting women survivors of sexual and physical abuse.

Over the past decade, the number of men disclosing their victimization and seeking support has increased. Statistics indicate that established service models are unsuccessful in serving male survivors. Evidence shows that men access services very differently from women, and that their comfort level for disclosing and engaging is also very different. A large majority of male survivors will request services for non-sexual assault related issues, and after trust and safety has been established, usually will disclose historical sexual abuse.



The need for specific services for men has become increasingly evident. Efforts has been made by some organizations across Canada to understand the specific needs of men with the creation of services to address those needs. In Ontario, the Region of Peel has become a frontrunner in this area, with Family Services of Peel (FSP) leading the Support Services for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse for Central Ontario.

As the Lead agency of the Men's Program designed to support men who have experienced childhood sexual abuse FSP has contracted with the following organizations: Catholic Community Services of York Region, Catholic Family Services of Peel/Dufferin, Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County, Family Services of Durham, Horizon Counselling, Consulting and Training, Hope 24/7, Family Services of Toronto, Catholic Family Services of Toronto, Cedar Centre, Native Child & Family Services of Toronto, Sexual Assault & Violence Intervention Services of Halton, United Achievers, Canadian Mental Health Association of Muskoka-Parry Sound Branch, Catholic Family Services of Durham. Organizations such as The Gate House and Canadian Centre for Men and Families not connected to the Men's Program also offer supports.



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IN CELEBRATION OF MEN AND FATHER'S DAY