

Men, women, police and medical services, the courts and political officials do not seem to be in a hurry to recognize the significance of sexual violence and of the threat it poses to the day-to-day lives of women.

The reality of sexual assault cannot be measured solely according to police statistics. In truth, only a slim proportion of all sexual assaults are reported to police.

Research conducted in recent years shows that in Canada, one in five women is sexually assaulted. In Quebec, it is estimated that more than 500,000 women have been either raped or sexually assaulted in their lifetime and that each year, approximately 14,000 women are sexually assaulted².

WHY?

It is no coincidence that aggressors are generally male, and their victims, female. Throughout history and the world, women have been assigned an inferior status. Despite certain changes, our sex predetermines our roles as men or women. From these roles has evolved a range of cultures in which men have acquired varying degrees of personal, collective, economic, political and physical power. The activities and characteristics of women are deemed inferior to those of men. Sexual assault is the most obvious example of the imbalance between men and women.

No specific culture or era has a monopoly on violence perpetrated by men against women.

Rape was and continues to be committed within the context of plundering the enemy. Ancient warriors considered women as their legitimate booty and viewed rape as acceptable behaviour under the rules of war. Rape was and continues to be commonly used to terrorize and intimidate the enemy. In Vietnam, for example, we witnessed examples of widespread rape committed by U.S. troops. Even during the age of chivalry when "chaste and pure women" were

² Projections based on the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey and the National Sexual Offences Survey, 1983.