

*Government Orders*

level. We must stop thinking that violence concerns only those who batter their spouse. Everybody is concerned. Having said that, I believe that the immediate solution lies in both court action and psychological assistance."

As we can see, both of these experts consider referral to the court as both a deterrent and a cure.

Women, even those not subjected to spousal abuse, live in fear. Why? Two professors at the School of Social Work of the University of Montreal published, in the *International Review of Community Action*, the results of a study on women's fear of crime and the various forms of violence to which they are subjected.

First of all, their report is a reminder that our published statistics on crimes committed against women are distorted. One of the reasons is that many women feel guilty for being assaulted, particularly if it happens while they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs or when they are in places that are "not nice".

I also mentioned previously the statistics on drinking in cases where one spouse murders the other, which is the ultimate form of spousal assault.

The authors also establish a link between spousal assault and society's attitudes in general. They blame the psycho-social approach used until very recently to deal with the issue.

The family being considered as a dynamic unit, responsibility for violent crimes committed within it had to be shared by all members. At that time, the expression "dysfunctional family" was used instead of referring to victims and assaults, in order to trivialize and decriminalize aggressions.

The authors also maintain that their study shows that women in general live in fear of being assaulted, that victimized women are also afraid of denouncing their assailants and finally that the women who have the courage to go to court must deal with the confrontational nature of our legal system. The traditional attitudes in our society are of no help to these women, especially since they are conveyed by men who do not have to face the same reality.

• (1255)

How does Bill C-72 help to somewhat improve the current situation of victims of assault?

First of all, it is important to remind people that this bill was introduced to neutralize the negative effect of the judgment made in the Daviault case and dealing with violent crimes. The bill makes it clear that a defendant will not be allowed to use intoxication as a defence when a crime of general intent was committed involving interference, or the threat to interfere, or any kind of assault vis-à-vis the integrity of another person.

So, the bill covers the majority of violent crimes, the others falling into the specific intent category, which can lead to a conviction for an included offence, as I said at the beginning of my speech.

To answer the question, we can say that the bill will facilitate the conviction of the aggressors. At the present time, a person charged with a general intent offence can plead voluntary intoxication. If this defence is allowed, the person will be cleared of all charges. So the bill takes us back to the situation that existed before the Supreme Court decision.

Such a move will send a message to society that aggressors must be punished because acts of aggression are serious and cannot be tolerated. At the same time, victims will feel encouraged to file a complaint. The cycle of spousal abuse can be broken only if violence is denounced, the aggressors punished and the victims helped.

Furthermore, like many other pieces of legislation, this bill will serve both as an educational and a dissuasive tool. It clearly states the zero-tolerance position of this Parliament against violence. We find the policy position of the House in the preamble to the Bill. Thus, the direct link between violence and the violation of women's rights to security of the person and to the equal protection and benefit of the law is mentioned. The principle of criminal accountability of the person who deliberately becomes intoxicated is also recognized, and that is very important. And, in addition, the victims' right to protection is recognized.

Finally, the bill refers to a standard of care defined in relation to the prohibition of violent behaviour towards another person.

This legislation is a step in the right direction and it meets the expectations of human rights groups, particularly those who are involved with women who are victims of domestic violence. Violence is a problem that must be eliminated, and we recognize that this bill is part of the solution. That is why we will support it.

However, other measures must be taken both in terms of legislation and government decisions. We have to make sure that groups who work with victims have all the support they need to reach their goals.

We can deplore the fact that the government has been withdrawing part of its funding for anti-violence support programs. In six years, financial assistance to these organizations has been reduced by 23 per cent. The number of grants has also been reduced by 47 per cent. The best intentions will never be more than intentions if they are not followed up with financial support.

The recommendations made by the various task forces and commissions will also have to be examined and implemented if we want to be able to say one day that gender equality really does exist in our society.