

B. VIOLENCE PREVENTION INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS

A number of witnesses argued before the Committee that primary prevention of violence against women should be a national priority. They stressed that the fundamental character of Canadian society will not be altered until we look at how young men and young women are socialized. Accordingly, the education system needs to become an active partner in eradicating violence against women.

According to Kitty O'Callahan, the President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the family context of students' lives provides models of how power, control, and punishment should be distributed; these influences on behaviour are acted out in the schools. Abusers and victims are shaped in early life. She added:

Those who observe trends in education from outside the system are ever more likely to call public attention to increasing violence in our schools, to the growing number of at risk students present in schools..., to the unacceptably high drop-out rate, and to an almost fatalistic despair typical of all too many of our adolescents. These kinds of behaviours, according to research, are entirely consistent with those exhibited by young people exposed to violence in the home. The pundits ignore any connections and appear unwilling to explore how the context of children's lives influences the more obvious aspects of schooling. (4:10)

The Committee learned how threats and actual victimization have led to feelings of extreme vulnerability and fear in adolescent women in this country. The Canadian Teachers' Federation carried out interviews across Canada with nearly 1,000 young women between the ages of 11 and 19 to find out how they perceived the world and their place in it. Included in the survey was the open-ended question "Name three things that you thought about in the last day or the last few days." Some of their responses included:

You just have to close your ears and get on with your life. Sometimes you have no choice — the streets or your dad bothering you — or your brother or your uncle. Do men ever stop thinking of you just as something for sex? Life's sad for most people. I know I must be strong, no one is going to take care of me...

Who can you trust these days? I can't be sure it won't happen to me. Can I say no if I loved my dad? (4:8)

Guys force you to do things that you don't want to — they presume you'll say yes. I'm scared to walk down the road at night. Rape really scares me. (4:9)

A 1991 research study involving 1,000 students from schools in London, Ontario, found a significant proportion of students who go home to violence in their family every night and many who are already in a violent dating relationship. A very high proportion of students indicated awareness of dating violence in their circle of acquaintances: 54%