

In her experience, Michelle Doyon, of the Federation of CLSCs in Quebec, has found that women feel ashamed of and responsible for the violence in their lives. When they seek medical care for physical and psychological ailments such as headaches, stomach aches, insomnia and depression they rarely relate these maladies to their abuse. She noted that prejudice and lack of knowledge on part of medical practitioners inhibits them from looking beyond the symptoms, asking the right questions and helping women link their medical problems to violence (10:13).

The Committee is aware that some community agencies have taken steps to alter staff attitudes to violence and have developed protocols and procedures to respond to the abuse of women and children. According to witnesses, however, informed and comprehensive responses are uneven and fragmented across the country. The Committee believes that front-line agencies, which are often one of the first sources of help a victim will approach, have a moral, professional and social responsibility to intervene in ways that are sensitive and appropriate to the needs of the woman.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that the federal government take the lead role on gender sensitivity training for law enforcement personnel by requiring police officers in the federal sector (R.C.M.P.) to take mandatory training and refresher courses that focus on the prevalence of violence against women and children, its symptoms, its consequences for victims, and appropriate ways to respond to victims' needs. The content of the courses should be developed in consultation with front-line agencies that work with female victims of violence. The federal government should make available appropriate resources to provincial and municipal governments to enable them to require their personnel in the law enforcement, social and health sectors to take these courses.

D. JUDICIAL EDUCATION ON GENDER-EQUALITY ISSUES

It is through the criminal justice system that society articulates its denunciation of convicted aggressors and their actions. The function of the judge in the court setting is that of an arbiter; in criminal proceedings the role of the judge is to assess the relevance of evidence and to determine what constitutes truth. In civil proceedings the role of the judge is to resolve disputes between opposing interests. In our adversarial system of justice, judges are traditionally seen as acting as impartial adjudicators as they apply and interpret the law. However, as witnesses before the Committee pointed out, this task is