

The Association for Media Literacy was founded in 1978 in Ontario. Its goals are to create awareness among high school students of the pervasiveness of the mass media and their social, commercial, and political implications for the development of the self in society. The Association is made up of teachers who are committed to developing media literacy skills in young people who are immersed in media culture. Association members believe that media literacy, which is a mandatory part of the high school curriculum in the province of Ontario, is an essential tool for understanding media representations, including those of violence toward women. Ms. Posner noted that the Association does not advocate censorship but rather attempts to put gender representation into context and encourage young people to look at what the media are portraying with a more critical eye.

The Committee is aware of the pervasive and powerful role that the media play in our culture. As well, it is concerned about the images of women portrayed in the mainstream media which legitimize violence and desensitize viewers to its effects. It considers media literacy to be an essential component of violence prevention education to equip students critically to assess media violence and gender representation.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the federal government work with the provinces, the territories and relevant professions to promote media literacy education in the high school curriculum across the country. Media literacy instruction teaches students to critically assess media representations and messages including violence against women.

C. EDUCATION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN FOR PROFESSIONALS

The Committee heard testimony that stressed the continuing need of doctors, emergency room nurses, police and social workers for education about wife assault, sexual assault and dating violence. Some professionals were described as having minimal knowledge about indicators of abuse, sensitive and supportive intervention techniques, appropriate treatment and available community resources for referral. They were also described as reluctant to become involved in wife assault and child physical and/or sexual abuse cases. The witnesses felt that when professionals fail to provide adequate and comprehensive assistance to victims of violence they are reflecting and reinforcing the widely held views that the family home is a private domain in which a man has exclusive authority over his wife and his children and that victims abused or assaulted by family members or strangers are themselves to blame.