

## ***THE IMPACT OF SOCIALISATION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE***

As a faithful reader of our chronicles, you have certainly come to realize that domestic violence is in fact a social problem. The power exercised by men and the violence inflicted upon women is a reality which unfortunately, is as old as the world itself! Society has witnessed historical inequalities within the relationships between the sexes and domestic violence is a true consequence of such a situation. Diving into the past reveals to us a world where women were isolated within the private sphere of society, where the responsibilities of domestic life and child rearing were forced upon them. At most, the members of the female persuasion were permitted to be active in the domain of arts and culture. Although unjustified, the private sphere was recognised and deemed to be of lesser importance than the public sphere of society ruled by men. In addition, this division of labour attributed a pronounced position of power to the male population. Regardless of her role in society, all women were and are confronted, although in different degrees, by an unequal distribution of power and grave inequalities. Unequal relationships, discrimination and violence find their origins in a sexist socialisation.

Domestic violence is an issue relevant to all members of society. It is intimately related to our socialisation which has a great impact on this social problem. Before we continue, let us explain that socialisation is the learning process in which individuals are taught and internalise the models, values, social norms and behaviours they are exposed to within their environments. It is of intricate importance to underline that our socialisation permits us to integrate within society and allows us to be accepted by our peers. Socialisation characterised by sexism creates distinct roles and specific behaviours that are then assigned to each of the sexes. For example boys are taught and therefore learn to be strong, independent, to obtain privileges, preserve their egos and become intolerant of frustrations. In striking opposition girls learn to take care of others and feel responsible for their well being, to be devoted, understanding and respond to others needs without acknowledging their own.

Young girls are quickly embarked upon this road of socialisation when they are given dolls, dish sets and various toys encouraging them to reproduce the traditional female roles they have already began observing. These toys are instruments which persuade children to learn and master the role which society expects them to fulfill. Therefore a presumably innocent toy becomes a concise tool in expressing a clear division of social roles. Unfortunately this division does not favour equality. Instead it maintains women in a position of service and consciously excludes her from the public spheres of society where the powers of politics and economics exist.

Family is one of the first settings of our socialisation. Children grow to reproduce the models found in their environment. Gradually, youngsters learn how to think, react and behave based upon the human relationships they observe. In the unfortunate reality where they are exposed to representations of woman as objects that tend to the needs of all others before her own or if they become witnesses to acts of control and violence, a child will integrate these examples of human behaviour as norms. Therefore, these norms will soon dictate their behaviour and continue the succession of unequal relationships. Of course, the family unit is not the only social milieu where socialisation promoting sexist ideals exists. The setting of a daycare, institutions of education and places of work are all environments where members of society are exposed to various models that contribute to the construction of our identities.

Let us further investigate the issue of socialisation. A child has only begun to become familiar with the world when it hears a friend proclaim "Boys are stronger than girls!" and so it is revealed that even at such a young and impressionable age, children are exposed to unjustified messages clearly defining an expected division of social roles. Later, we are bombarded by ridiculous jokes and expressions that perpetuate unfounded prejudices. These comments may present themselves as innocent but they have sustained the image of the emotionally charged female as opposed to the level headed, sensible male, thus aiming to devalue the female.

The media is also an important agent in our socialisation. Which ever of its tools it uses (the internet, radio, or television) models of female as well as male behaviours are presented to us. Regardless of our age, these images and representations influence our perceptions as well as our relationships with others. And here's an interesting observation concerning mass media: the hosts of shows based upon politics and economics are more often males while females host the majority of series focusing on health and culture. Now, imagine the impact of that!

It is important to note, that the limited opportunities for a women to possess power within society, is not a concept foreign to the social problem of domestic violence. Although this inequality is a constant component in the daily lives of women, victims of domestic violence find themselves in a pronounced position of submission as they are also excluded from the decision making process and ignored in the distribution of power within the sphere of their own homes.

Although socialisation influences us to reproduce what we see it does not eliminate the possibility of social change. We can make a difference! On an intimate level we can begin by questioning our own socialisation and social relationships. In addition we can encourage the younger generations to develop their capacity to analyse and form an opinion concerning the behaviours they are persuaded to imitate. On a global level, we can entice change by insisting that all sectors of society, including mass media, abstain from representation of sexist ideals and models.

We have strength in ourselves as individuals and by joining forces with others, we find strength in numbers as well! We must all participate in this quest to question the values that transcend the generations of society and become agents of change. It is only in such a way that society will evolve into a world of greater equality between the sexes thus helping to cease the existence of domestic violence.

**For emergency contact 911**

*«This article's serie has been created by the women's shelters of Laval. This original project has been financed by the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Laval.»*