

**OUR SHELTERS OFFER A WARM WELCOME, A LISTENING EAR AND
A SAFE HAVEN, TO ALL WOMEN OF THE WORLD!**

It is a most unfortunate reality but there is no woman that is safe from the threat of violence, as it is a social problem that exists in every culture and society. The victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life; they are women of all ages, from all social groups and of all levels of education and status.

As we know, domestic violence also touches immigrant women and those from ethno cultural communities. It is of great importance to understand that for these women, their experience with domestic violence is highly intense. These women face additional difficulties that are a result of their migrating to a new country and having to adapt/integrate within a foreign culture and society.

Before exploring this subject further, we will explain the terms *immigrant*, *permanent resident* and *ethno cultural community*. A woman who identifies herself as an *immigrant* or a *permanent resident* is an individual born in a foreign country who has now decided to establish herself in Canada. A female from an *ethno cultural community* is an individual born within or outside Canada whose interests, values, perception of identity and heritage is shared with a distinct ethno cultural group. In addition to these two groups, it is important to note that there are also women who for various reasons have temporarily come to settle in Canada.

Reality reflects to us a world, where being an immigrant or an individual from an ethno cultural community, unjustly results in discrimination and social exclusion. Furthermore, because of her sex a woman will also face a reality of prejudice and even violence, within the different spheres of her life. As such, females from an ethno cultural background and female immigrants find themselves in a particularly difficult situation for they are doubly discriminated against as they face racism as well as sexism. Therefore, these women experience intolerance based on their sex, ethnic origin, religion, education, and cultural values. In addition, they can endure hostility from the local population and must also deal with immigration laws and procedures which can be a complicated, lengthy process, in a language that is not their own. And so this life altering, energy consuming ordeal, which demands unimaginable courage, heavily impacts these women and their children, who find themselves far from their native lands.

In addition to discrimination, these women are also especially vulnerable to the realities and consequences of domestic violence. Imagine for a moment, a woman who has become a victim of domestic violence. Surely, we all have become conscious of what a terrifying and horrific experience this would be. Now imagine, that her access to certain resources are limited and that she is denied certain services, all because she does not possess a recognized and stable status within Canada! An equally distressing situation is the experience of a victim who has come to Canada after being *sponsored* by her partner, for these circumstances will only reinforce a state of economical and legal dependency. In such state of affairs, where issues of immigration are present, women can face greater risks of becoming victims of all forms of violence (economical, physical, psychological, verbal, sexual), she can also be threatened, black mailed, and even forced into prostitution.

Whether the domestic violence commenced before, during, or after the act of immigration, the motivation of this violence remains a constant, as it always does within domestic violence. Regardless of one's culture, this genre of violence expresses the desire of the male partner to maintain his control over the female and preserve his privileges.

Multiple factors can act as a barrier and keep this female population imprisoned in a context of domestic violence. Such factors include: an absence of knowledge concerning existing resources and services, different cultural references, difficulties in communicating due to a language barrier, distrust of legal authorities and formal institutions, fear of being rejected by one's community, fear of judgment, social isolation, social taboos etc..

The counselors at women shelters are well aware and sensitive to the obstacles and fears experienced by all women who take the great and courageous step of reaching out for help. And so, if you are a woman from an ethno cultural community or if you are a female who has immigrated to Canada, who finds herself in a violent intimate relationship, you are most likely frightened and ashamed, feeling guilty, helpless and confused, not sure of what to do. Know that you are not alone. Know that what you are feeling is shared by all women who are unjustly victimized by their partners. Know, that the counselors at shelters for women and children who are the victims of domestic violence, are truly here for you. Know that these shelters can support you in creating a life without violence and this by offering, amongst many other services, the following:

- A safe and confidential refuge
- A warm welcome, a listening ear, an open and non judgmental environment
- Information concerning the rights of women and their children
- Referral services
- Accompaniment and support in all that you have to do
- Listening services, individual as well as group meetings to all victims of domestic violence regardless of whether they have resided at the shelter
- As well as, the possibility of an interpreter

So if you are in need, always remember that we are here for you and waiting for your call. Until then...

**You can also contact the following organisation for referral services:
SOS Violence Conjugale: 1-800-363-9010**

**And, if there is a threat of, or an actual occurrence of violence:
Please contact 911.**

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