

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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My name is Laura. I have been a Counsellor on Duty at Women's House Serving Bruce and Grey for over a year now, a full-fledged angry feminist for (at least) 8 years, and a female human for 29.5 years.

Writing this piece – as my contribution to WH's 'Women Abuse Prevention Month' campaign – did not come easily to me. I wanted to get my point across and really grab people's attention, in an effort to highlight the issue of violence against women (VAW). Too many people are unaware of the degree to which this is an issue in Canada, and more specifically, Ontario, Bruce Grey, etc. The unfortunate reality is that VAW is a massive societal problem: one that will take the conscious effort and action of women and men everywhere to eliminate. This issue is extremely prevalent in our rural Bruce & Grey counties. The issue of VAW is something that I have become extremely passionate about raising awareness towards over the last 10 years or so – as my eyes were opened to the magnitude of the problem.

Similarly, to the concept of 'feminism', the issue of VAW is often masked in myths and misconceptions, making it even more difficult to educate and raise awareness on the topic. Below you will find the most common myths and misconceptions that I have encountered throughout my life: through my VAW- focused education, my employment at WH and through personal experiences, relationships, and conversations. This is not a list of facts I found on the internet or copied from a brochure. These are real-life attitudes and beliefs that I have witnessed and heard escape the mouths of both men and women through my lifetime in a female body. They are real-life attitudes and beliefs that do not accurately reflect the current level of crisis and alternatively reinforce misogynistic ideologies.

If the abuse was legitimate and severe, a woman would leave.

There are a wide range of reasons why women don't leave abusive relationships. From joint finances, shared children, manipulation from abuser, to a lack of understanding of the definition and forms of abuse. The most alarming factor when discussing reasons women stay in abusive relationships is fear. So many abused women are so fearful that their partner will become enraged with them leaving, and that this

will result in even more severe violence. This fear can be paralyzing and can cause a woman to continue to stay with their partner and endure abuse. Sadly, these fears are justified. Statistically, women are 70 times more likely to be killed in the weeks following leaving their abuser than any other time during their relationship.

Domestic violence is a private family matter.

There are many reasons why women stay in abusive relationships, but often it is for fear that in leaving, their partner will become so enraged and seek retaliation, ultimately putting the woman in more danger. If women in these situations had other people in their life who could act as an army of support behind them, the steps ahead of them required to escape abuse would seem more feasible. With these essential allies in place, women would have access to more information, more practical assistance, and ultimately, more support. Too many people believe that the topic of domestic abuse and the specific things that occur between two people in a romantic relationship are taboo in nature and "off limits" to talk about. This is extremely problematic. It is vital that people become alert to potential red-flags and signs of the presence of abuse. These red flags need to be given the appropriate amount of attention so that potential further abuse does not occur. Though many people would be uncomfortable addressing a situation as such, abuse is abuse and violence is violence. It is our individual responsibilities to check in our loved ones. We all have the power to step in in some way and prevent further harm.

Instances of assault are accidental and examples of 'good guys making a mistake'.

Abuse is a choice. You don't "accidentally" assault someone. In situations of violence against women, society far too often gives the benefit of the doubt to the male perpetrator, relying on past examples of good behaviour to "prove" that he is a good person and that this so-called isolated event was simply a mistake. These concepts and the actual unhealthy/violent behaviours themselves have been normalized, which is extremely problematic. Statistics show that the majority of violence that women experience is at the hands of someone they know, and that the majority of sexual assaults are pre-meditated. Abusive behaviours and acts are conscious

choices. They are not accidental and society needs to stop treating them as such.

There is nothing that individual people can do to make a difference in preventing violence against women.

This misconception is so completely upside down. There are endless ways individuals (male or female) can contribute to the prevention of VAW. The efforts can range from miniscule to extensive, and could include: shutting down sexist jokes (saying 'that's not funny' and explaining why); challenging sexist behaviour; raising children to treat women with respect; teaching children to understand the importance of consent and healthy relationships; helping to challenge the idea that domestic abuse is a private family matter; checking in on your female friends and family if you see signs of abusive behaviour in their relationships; and being vigilant on watching for signs of misogynistic behaviours and attitudes in male friends and family. All of these things and SO MANY MORE will positively contribute to preventing further VAW.

In 2019, Women's House provided service to 938 women and 224 children, and fielded 10,619 crisis and support calls.

Our services are available free of charge.

If you are a woman in crisis, please call our 24-hour crisis or sexual assault support lines to speak to a counsellor.

Toll Free Crisis #: 1.800.265.3026

Local Crisis #: 519.396.9655

Sexual Assault #: 1.866.578.5566

Website: www.whsbg.on.ca

Facebook: @WomensHouseServingBruceGrey

Instagram: @womens.house.bruce.grey