

Equality called key to ending abuse

BY RANDY RICHMOND
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A high-profile review of domestic violence in Ontario puts too much blame on friends and families of victims and offers a bandage solution, a London women's advocate charges.

"There seems to be a shift away from holding the abuser accountable and now holding society accountable," Megan Walker, head of the London Abused Women's Centre, said yesterday.

"No (ordinary people) can stop a man from killing a woman if that is what he wants to do."

The report, which highlights the need for more public education and awareness, misses the key point about domestic violence, she said.

"Domestic violence will end when there is equality between men and women," Walker said.

"Unless that changes, we will continue to see women killed and children killed."

The fourth annual report of Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, released yesterday, calls for increased awareness and intervention by members of the public and professionals.

The report does not shift responsibility for stopping violence from the abusers to others, said London psychologist Peter Jaffe, a member of the review committee.

But in six of the 13 homicides reviewed, several people — including family members, friends and co-workers — knew abuse was happening, he said.

“There were warning signs,” Jaffe said.

The report makes 33 recommendations, many focusing on what could have been done before the deaths.

“People have to know how to take action,” said Jaffe, academic director at the University of Western Ontario’s Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

Society has to be careful about putting too much responsibility on the shoulders of family and friends, Walker countered.

“When we start shifting responsibility to co-workers, family and friends, we start to blame them if something goes wrong,” Walker said.

“It’s not up to families, friends and co-workers to save lives, but to support women.”

The key is changing the way women are viewed, she said.

Too many men consider women their property because women do not have equal rights and are still sexually exploited in the mass media, Walker said.

Jaffe agreed that giving women equality is a necessary condition for ending abuse.

“There is not going to be a quick fix,” Jaffe said.

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