

August 7, 2004 Saturday Final Edition

TOUGH GIRLS; A CASE OF FEMALE TEEN VIOLENCE IN CHATHAM- KENT IS A SIGN OF A DISTURBING TREND AMONG YOUNG WOMEN.

BYLINE: BY TEVIAH MORO, FREE PRESS REPORTER

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The three London teens, seasoned scrappers, aren't shy to show off their battle scars.

Felicia, 18, Stephanie, 15, and Pam, 15, all London high school students, openly share their best fight stories when stopped on a downtown street corner.

"A lot of people are getting hurt for nothing," says Felicia, who has scabs on her hands from fighting.

She said the worst act of violence she's ever committed was punching someone in the face and kicking them.

In one fight, Pam says, she "took her (opponent's) hair and smashed her head on my knee."

The teens say girls get into fights over anything from insults to disputes over boyfriends.

"Anything that pisses me off," Stephanie says, smirking.

Their attitudes match those of a 19-year-old female convicted in a Chatham court this week of helping to choke, punch and kick a 17-year-old as many 300 times.

Shalynn Lozon, 19, pleaded guilty to assault with a weapon and forcible confinement in the May 18 beating. The other females, both 17, pleaded guilty earlier to assault.

Lozon lured the 17-year-old victim to a Wallaceburg home where she and her accomplices assaulted the girl for up to three hours, leaving her with cuts, bruises and a concussion.

Lozon's confession was chilling: "We had it in our minds that we would beat her until something broke."

That's the kind of mindset that has parents, teachers, lawmakers and counsellors worried.

"At a young age, they have clearly learned that the way they see as most effective for addressing a conflict is through violence and really extreme violence," says Barb MacQuarrie.

Violence among young women is on the rise, notes MacQuarrie, community development co-ordinator for the Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario.

A study conducted by Anne Cummings and Alan Leschied, professors at Western's faculty of education, surveyed 70 troubled young women in Southwestern Ontario between the ages of 12 and 19.

Fifty-three per cent of the participants said they had been in at least one physical fight.

For about half of the participants, fights happened on a weekly or monthly basis, while for the other half, once a year or less.

"Canada is facing a challenge of increasing numbers of young women in its youth justice system," says the report.

Researchers are trying to understand what's troubling teenage girls, MacQuarrie says.

MacQuarrie doesn't excuse the Wallaceburg girls' personal responsibility in the attack, but says society gives messages that can egg girls on.

But why some girls are susceptible to messages of violence on television, in movies and video games and others aren't is an enigma, she said.

"Why did these girls absorb and internalize that message so deeply and so completely when others obviously resist and don't?"

A lot of girls who engage in violent acts have been abused themselves, MacQuarrie says.

The next phase of the centre's research will explore that connection.

"Maybe, we'll have more concrete answers in a few years."

Meanwhile in downtown London, the violence is simple to explain -- for the girls at least.

The other day, Pam says, a girl insulted her about her skirt.

Pam's ready for a reply, if she meets the girl again.

"If she looks at me, I'm gonna punch her in the face."

August 11, 2004 Wednesday Final Edition

GAMES GLAMOURIZE FEMALE VIOLENCE

BYLINE: BY ELAINE MURRAY, LONDON

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Violent female teenagers have been around forever (**Tough Girls**, Aug. 7). It was not looked at as a serious crime and went unreported for many reasons, one of which was that if the victim was a male, he was made to feel like a sissy for reporting it to peers or people in authority.

Barb MacQuarrie, co-ordinator for the Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children, makes a good point when she says television movies and playing video games such as Lara Croft Tomb Raider may lead to increased young female violence.

More and more, we see females glamourized as they kill or maim in the movies for the entertainment of our young people.

MacQuarrie's measured statement telling us we must start looking at the root of the problem of violence, instead of only dwelling on the aftermath, is well taken.