

## Naming An Atrocity

Every day in Canada, women are maligned, humiliated, shunned, screamed at, pushed, kicked, punched, assaulted, beaten, raped, physically disfigured, tortured, threatened with weapons and murdered (National Action Plan 1993). We have names for this atrocity: wife assault, spousal assault, domestic violence, and domestic disputes. The language used to describe an issue shares a perspective, defines the issue and ultimately impacts the subsequent actions taken or not taken. In the case of violence against women, naming the atrocity has been a vital component of making the invisible visible. So what is in a name? For many years terms like spousal assault, domestic disputes and wife assault have been used to describe violence against women. These terms may seem to be innocuous, however, they inaccurately describe and define the substantive nature of the violence faced by women in their intimate relationships. Consequently, they could lead to inappropriate directions for policy development. Specifically, these terms generally fail to attend to the gender-specific nature of violence in relationships. Further, these terms obscure both the social and cultural dimensions of the problem. They blur the issue of the abusers' accountability and move to mutual battering scenarios. In addition, they also tend to ignore the range of relationships ie: dating, common-law and ex-partnerships, in which violence against women occurs.

In utilizing the term woman abuse, the community provides a more accurate acknowledgement that the most common "domestic violence" situations involve women being abused by their male partners. Furthermore, this definition makes clear that the problem of woman abuse is not limited or restricted by marital status or sexual orientation. Finally, since the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the London Police Service follow this same language, it provides increased consistency between community members.

Language is not neutral. Let's call this atrocity what it is - woman abuse.