



“PRIVATE VIOLENCE, PUBLIC VIOLENCE, BREAK THE CYCLE”

For over 20 years, the FIQ has intensified its interventions on the issue of violence against women: publication of numerous brochures, enquiry on violence in the health-care institutions, development of a policy against violence, commemoration of December 6th, etc. Progress has been made over the course of these years and the silence is starting to be broken.

THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

On November 11 and 12, the Women's Network met in Montreal under the theme “Private violence, public violence, break the cycle”. In spite of difficulties for some in obtaining union leaves because of the vaccination campaign against Influenza A(H1N1), nearly one hundred women participated in this meeting of the Network.

In addition to attending the well-received presentations of the two guest speakers, Nathalie Villeneuve of the *Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale* and Alexandra Pierre, Coordinator of the *Association des aides familiales du Québec*, the participants were informed of the work of the Status of Women Sector, the activities scheduled for the 12 days of action for the elimination of violence against women, the latest news on the World March of Women and participated in a creative workshop for the banners that will denounce the violence. ■

There is now a certain social recognition of the phenomenon of violence: a policy against violence has been adopted in a large number of institutions and some employers have signed a declaration formally committing themselves to insure a violence-free workplace for their employees. However, it must be pointed out that violence still exists and it is too often trivialized. Violence injures, destroys and kills every day. As reported recently in *Le Devoir*, over 17,300 cases of conjugal violence were registered in Quebec by the police in 2008. “Enough to fill the Bell Centre” was the newspaper's headline.

Given that the 20 year anniversary of the drama at the *Polytechnique* has been recognized, the Status of Women Sector, deemed it important that the Women's

Network once again examine the issue of violence. Since this sad event, the women's movement has developed an expertise and refined its approach. Thus, the sector is currently working on an update of the reference framework for counteracting violence in the workplace “To Work in Dignity, Violence – Zero Tolerance”. This reference document, which will be published in 2010, also tackles the subject of psychological harassment, unfortunately a well-known form of violence. It was not officially recognized before 2004, when psychological harassment was included in the Act respecting Labour Standards. This document will also deal with specific forms of violence experienced by women of race, who are handicapped, elderly or homosexual. ■

“Gender-based violence is perhaps the most wide-spread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. The cost to women, their children and to the community is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, gender equality [...] Gender-based violence is preponderantly inflicted by men towards women and girls. It both reflects and reinforces the inequities between men and women and compromises the health, security and autonomy of its victims.”

United Nations Populations Fund - UNFPA, State of world population 2005, Chapter 7, “Gender-Based Violence”: Too high a cost”, 2005, web site: www.unfpa.org

News from the Status of Women Sector

THE CNCPS HAS TAKEN FLIGHT

The *Coalition nationale contre les publicités sexistes* (CNCPS) held its founding assembly on November 2nd. The mission of the CNCPS is to denounce and demand and require the removal of gender-based publicity which attacks the dignity of women with the view of eliminating these types of images from the advertising landscape.

Given the success of the campaign against the Brown company's advertisements, it was proposed that this year there be a campaign to demand the removal of gender-based publicity by American Apparel.

The email address of the Coalition is: info@coalition-cncps.org ■



During a workshop, the participants at the Women's Network divided into eight groups and showing creativity, made little banners with a message against violence against women. These banners have been proudly hung with those from other women from the four corners of Quebec, at the same time as the human chain was formed on December 6th (see photo at right).

THE FFQ HAS A NEW PRESIDENT

At the general assembly of the organization in September, Alexa Conradi was elected president of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ), thus succeeding Michèle Asselin who had been the president for 6 years.

Alexa has been actively involved in the women's centre and with various coalitions for more than fifteen years. She has worked, among others, as the coordinator of the 2000 World March of Women. She delivered the following message when she was elected: "As president of the FFQ, I intend to be involved in the women's movement in order to demonstrate the continued importance of feminism today. It is with firm conviction that we are going to disprove the positions that maintain that equality has been achieved."

Welcome Alexa! ■

12 DAYS OF ACTION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

For a second year, on the initiative of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*, a coalition of women's groups, including the FIQ, asked the public to mark the 12 days of action for the elimination of violence against women. The Network meeting was the opportunity to re-launch the invitation to sign the declaration "Violence towards women is never trivial!" which was published in *Le Devoir* and *Le Soleil* on November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

At a press conference on November 25th, ten men of all ages and from different backgrounds expressed their support in the fight to end violence against women,

emphasizing the importance of the feminist movement "which is one of the most progressive and needed movements in society".

Commemorative events were organized on December 4, 5 and 6 within a seminar on the 20 year anniversary of the drama at the *Polytechnique*. Régine Laurent, President of the FIQ, mentioned the conference at an international panel on violence against workers. The seminar ended with the forming of a human chain around *Parc Émilie-Gamelin* in Montreal. ■



THE WHITE POPPY

On Remembrance Day, symbolized by wearing a red poppy, each of the participants at the Women's Network received a white poppy, representing a commitment to a world free of violence and ruled by peace.

In England in November 1933, faced with rising tensions at the international level, a group of women, called the Women's Cooperative Guild, made up of mothers, widows and lovers of men killed in World War I, feared the start of another war. So, they decided to wear a white poppy to express their wish for peace. A hundred wars later, the white poppy is again a symbol of determination to end armed conflicts. ■

PRIVATE VIOLENCE

Addressing the participants in the Women's Network, Ms. Nathalie Villeneuve, President of the *Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale*, emphasized the importance of properly identifying violent situations and not confusing them with situations of conjugal conflict. She also stressed the fact that the credibility of the stakeholders greatly depends on this.

Violence against women is a concept that encompasses the idea of domination and compulsion. The authors agree that violence exists in all cases where someone seeks to impose his or her will on another person, whether by physical force, threats or humiliation. Violence is always expressed by a power relationship between individuals. Throwing an object against a wall in anger is an aggressive act. If this is an isolated act and is not perpetrated with the intention to intimidate or dominate another person or persons, this is undesirable behaviour, but it is not violence either.

In a conjugal violence situation, the spouse seeks to obtain power by violence. He wants to dominate the relationship. The aggression is intentional and is expressed in different ways; by physical compulsion, by social control, by denigration or by intimidation. This violence persists and a cycle of aggression, justification and reconciliation is formed. Violence then leads to fear and powerlessness.

A conjugal dispute or conflict exists in the following situations: aggression in which both parties want to prevail over each other by arguing about the subject of the dispute, where one or both parties display aggression without the other party feeling powerless, where both people stay focused on the subject of the dispute and where, if there is repetition, it is the subject that poses a problem and not the dynamics between the two parties.

Ms. Villeneuve proposes three indices which can help decode a situation and determine whether it is a conjugal dispute or conjugal violence: Does the dispute occur in the open? Do both parties seem to be on an equal footing? Is this the usual way they have a discussion?

Ms. Villeneuve's PowerPoint presentation, "*Violence conjugale ou chicane de couple : pour y voir plus clair!*", is available on the FIQ website. ■

PUBLIC VIOLENCE



Ms. Alexandra Pierre, Coordinator of the *Association des aides familiales du Québec (AAFQ)*, presented a disturbing picture of the situation of caregivers in Québec, while undermining certain myths. Her presentation troubled many of the Network's participants, flabbergasted to learn that such situations could exist here in Québec.

Caregivers are professionals who perform various duties in private homes. Nearly 80% of them are women and the same proportion are of immigrant origin. Contrary to the generally accepted idea, caregivers are educated. Indeed, 60% of them have a postsecondary diploma. In many cases, they left their country because they were lured by the possibility of obtaining a good job and hoped

to escape difficult socioeconomic conditions and offer their family a better life.

Women who come to Québec under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) must reside with their employer. Their work permit then is associated with this employer and they do not have access to the orientation or integration services to which immigrants are

PUBLIC VIOLENCE (CONT'D)

usually entitled. Sometimes the employer takes possession of the caregiver's papers upon her arrival. In such a context, some employers are inclined to abuse the situation by imposing prolonged or extendable work schedules and often unpaid overtime.

Moreover, many caregivers are subjected to different forms of violence: psychological harassment, discrimination related to their ethnic origin, sexual harassment or assault, etc. Cases of unpaid salary or vacations and abusive dismissal are common. On the other hand, the agencies and other intermediaries play a major role in the traffic and trade in migrant caregivers, often under the LCP.

An ad hoc group on caregivers, composed of about fifteen groups from community and labour circles, has been set up to call for international standards regarding this transnational phenomenon and decent work for caregivers, whether migrant or not. The FIQ is participating in this ad hoc committee, which must also submit a report to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2010. ■

THE WOMEN'S NETWORK'S FAVORITES



“I HATE FEMINISTS!”- DECEMBER 6, 1989 AND ITS AFTERMATH

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre, the Status of Women Committee picked a book by Mélissa Blais as the Network's favourite, “*J’haïs les féministes!*” - *Le 6 décembre 1989 et ses suites*.

A young feminist and doctoral student in sociology at UQAM, Mélissa Blais

was only 11 years old at the time of the Polytechnique tragedy. In writing this essay, she wanted to consider the consequences and the issues of this event. She also pursued an objective of prevention and commemoration, perceiving that many young people were totally ignorant of the December 6, 1989 massacre.

A confession: we had to cheat slightly in picking this favourite. The book had just been released in bookstores at the end of November, so none of the Committee members had read it at the time the Women's Network held its meeting. However, this didn't stop Nathalie Wallman and Annie Pinard from making it their favourite.

Here is an excerpt from the book:

“Ever since December 6, 1989, what angers documentary filmmaker Maureen Bradley isn't the memory of the massacre of fourteen women, but the denial of feminists' anger and the antifeminist backlash. While feminists, for over 20 years, have mobilized and continued to raise public awareness about violence against women, denouncing the fact that this is a seizure of power generally exercised by one or more men over one or more women, all types of antifeminists are seeking to sabotage this effort and reinforce the stereotypes against them.” ■

Schedule of activities of the 2010 World March of Women (WMW)

January 2010: Sending material concerning the demands conveyed by Quebec women to all the local teams and Status of Women reps

March 8, 2010: Launch of the WMW in every country in the world

March 8 to October 17, 2010: Marches in every country in the world

March 7, 2010: National launch of the WMW in Montreal with a symbolic gesture (to come)

October 12 to 17, 2010: WMW in Quebec

- October 12: Local marches (in cities or villages)
- October 13 and 14: Marches and general rallies
- October 14 and 15: Interregional marches (e.g., groups from different regions could meet up in a contingent heading to Rimouski)
- October 17: Major rally in Rimouski (activities organized from 11a.m. to 3 p.m.)

In each region, the actions will be coordinated through concerted action tables of women's groups and the list of these tables will be available on the web page of the FIQ Status of Women sector.



If you prefer to consult the electronic version of our publications, send a request to info@fiqante.qc.ca



Photos of Chantal Locat