

THE MONTREAL MASSACRE

We recognize December 6th in this country as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, because it is the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

On December 6th, 1989, Marc Lépine went into an engineering school called l'École Polytechnique de Montréal. He entered a classroom, separated the women from the men, and shot 9 women, killing 6. He then moved through the hallways, the cafeteria and another classroom targeting women. In all, he killed 14 women, and injured 10 women and 4 men. He then turned the gun on himself.

Lépine claimed that he was fighting feminism and chose the school specifically because engineering is a non-traditional career for women. This was a gender-based act of violence and a hate crime against women. While it was an extreme act of violence, we must not forget that everyday women face discrimination and harassment and many lose their lives to gender-based violence.



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NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Provided by OSSTF Toronto
Status of Women Committee
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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The statistics in Canada are staggering. Half of all women have experienced at least one incidence of physical or sexual violence and every 6 days a woman in Canada is killed by her domestic partner. Less than 10% of sexual assaults are ever reported to police, because women are often not believed and may be blamed for being assaulted. In 2009, less than half of one percent of sexual assaults in Canada led to a conviction.

These numbers are even worse in marginalized communities. Because of systemic racism, ableism, classism, homophobia and transphobia, the risk of violence is much higher for women of colour, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, poor women and queer and trans women.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN

While all women in this country are vulnerable, some communities face disproportional levels of violence. First Nations, Métis and Inuit women makeup just over 2% of the population of Canada, but Indigenous female victims represent 16% of all female homicide victims. Systemic issues of racism and poverty and the continued impacts of colonialism are some of the reasons why these communities experience more violence.

There are over 1000 unsolved cases of Indigenous women who have been murdered or have gone missing in Canada. Little has been done to find justice for the victims' families and communities, despite ongoing calls for action from Indigenous organizations like Sisters in Spirit, Idle No More and the Red Dress Movement. The new Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett has committed to begin consultations with victims' families for a national inquiry in the coming weeks.

THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

We must all remember that violence against women is not a women's issue. We are all responsible to end the violence, and men and boys must be allies in the work for gender equity. It will require a cultural shift to make this change.

We often talk about physical and sexual violence against women, but how men and boys treat women, speak to women and talk about women can contribute to a culture that devalues women's lives. That is why we are asking men and boys to call out sexist language and behaviour when you see it your school and in your community.

The White Ribbon Campaign began in 1991. The campaign cites that by wearing a white ribbon, men are "pledging to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls." The campaign envisions "a masculinity that embodies the best qualities of being a human." ("Who We Are").

Men and boys are an integral part of the solution to end this violence and create a more equitable society for women and girls.

TRANS WOMEN

In 2011, a study by Egale Canada reported that 74% of trans students in our schools are verbally harassed because of their gender identity, and 37% face physical harassment. In particular, trans girls and women experience the highest levels of harassment and violence.

Family rejection, employment discrimination, harassment at school and a lack of access to healthcare make trans women and girls more vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, street violence and homicide. Furthermore, ongoing harassment and discrimination leads to shame and isolation, and 43% of trans women in Canada attempt suicide at least once in their lives.

We are increasingly seeing trans women represented in our media, like athlete and socialite Caitlyn Jenner, author and journalist Janet Mock and actor and activist Laverne Cox. But we must not forget the struggles and barriers to safety, equity and respect that trans women face everyday.