

WOMEN ABUSE

The employee relations article is not based on the general labour legislation this quarter but will look at a matter/issue of universal great concern. However, it is not to imply that the labour legislation is of less significance.

The HR males (herein referred to as HR Men's Team) got together informally at Queen Elizabeth Park on 14 September 2018 and reflected on the scourge of women abuse which has become so prevalent and running like wildfire. Women abuse even includes violence sometimes with fatal consequences. It is very interesting that each and every one of them contributed passionately and immensely to the topic at issue hence this article is the outcome from that informal discussion. It was felt appropriate to informally discuss woman abuse considering that the month of August (which has just ended) is referred to as the women's month.

We need to keep the topic into perspective by providing its definition. Woman abuse is the intentional and systematic use of tactics to establish and maintain power and control over the thoughts, beliefs, and conduct of a woman through the inducement of fear and/or dependency (<http://pda.mao.ca/content/definition-women-abuse>). Consistent with this definition, it was felt that woman abuse falls into various categories with the following being the most obvious (the categories that were mentioned by the HR Men's Team are similar to those mentioned by Luke's Place and therefore, for the purposes of this article, have been combined into one):

Physical abuse involves slapping, shoving, punching, strangling, kicking, burning, stabbing and/or shooting, using a weapon or other objects to threaten, hurt or kill, and abducting a woman or keeping her imprisoned.

Emotional abuse (Luke's Place also refers to it as psychological abuse). When conversing with women informally, most if not all feel that this type of abuse is worse than physical abuse. According to Luke's Place, psychological abuse makes a woman feel humiliated resulting in them losing self-confidence. Worst of all, it is the kind of abuse that is difficult to explain to other people because there are no physical signs yet its impact is long-lasting (after the abuse has ended).

Psychological or emotional abuse includes verbal aggression/abuse including insulting a woman; belittling a woman through name-calling or descriptions such as 'stupid' 'crazy' or 'irrational'; stalking or harassing a woman; controlling a woman's actions, time, dress, hairstyle, etc.; forcing a woman to do degrading things (e.g. eating cigarette butts or licking the floor); forcibly confining a woman; engaging in deliberately threatening behaviours (e.g. driving dangerously or playing with weapons); threatening to harm or kill children, other family members, pets or prized possessions; threatening to remove, hide or prevent access to children, or threatening to report the woman to the Children's Aid Society; threatening to have the woman put in an institution; threatening to commit suicide; denying affection or personal care; taking away a woman's mobility device, teletype writer (TTY), medication, hearing aids, or guide dog; leaving a woman without transportation or any means of communication, especially in isolated or rural communities; and attacking a woman's self-esteem.

Social abuse is abusing a woman in front of her family, friends or co-workers or that is intended to isolate her from those people and includes putting her down or ignoring her in public; not letting the woman see her friends or family; making scene or embarrassing her when she is with friends, family or co-workers; being charming with others and aggressive with her; embarrassing the woman in front of children; placing limits on a woman about the people with whom she can talk on the phone or visit; and cutting a woman off from friends and family.

Stalking/harassment includes subjecting a woman to repetitive harassing or threatening actions that make her afraid in order to get something or just to punish her. It includes harassing her at work; repeated phone calls, sometimes with hang-ups; following or tracking her; using technology to find her; watching her with hidden cameras; showing up where she is, at home, school, work, in the grocery store, at a movie, or in a restaurant; harassing her with unwanted emails, text messages or through social media; sending her unwanted packages, flowers, cards, gifts, or letters; monitoring her phone calls or computer use; contacting her friends, family, co-workers, or neighbours to find out about her; going through her garbage; threatening to hurt her or her family, friends or pets; damaging her home, car or property; using the children as an excuse to repeatedly call/phone her or to show up where she and the children are (at the children's school or day care, at their extracurricular activities); and engaging in legal bullying during family court proceedings.

Legal bullying is using family law/family court process to maintain power over and intimidate a woman. It includes dragging out the proceedings to wear the woman down emotionally or deplete her financial resources; refusing to sell the matrimonial home; delaying providing financial disclosure; appearing charming and conciliatory to the judge or other legal personnel and denying the abuse, raising questions about the credibility of the woman's story; not allowing children to call home on access visits; acting as his own lawyer; making repeated motions over minor or inappropriate issues; using intimidation and threats if the woman doesn't agree to financial arrangements that the abuser wants; pressurising her to accept mediation and joint custody arrangements or to trade away some legal rights (e.g. the right to property or financial support) in exchange for others (e.g. custody of the children); contacting the woman out of court, claiming it is to talk about the case; threatening to obtain sole custody of the children if she insists on leaving; making malicious reports to the court and other officials (child protection authorities, police, housing personnel, etc.) about the woman; threatening harm or death if the woman pursues legal proceedings; using stalking behaviours (property damage, excessive phone calls, phone threats and verbal abuse, phoning and hanging up, etc.), particularly if the woman takes a stand against what he wants; attempting to interfere in the professional relationship a woman has with her own lawyer; if he has been criminally charged, pressuring her to change bail conditions or to try to have the charges dropped; and having her charged by the police.

Economic abuse is any act or behaviour that gives the abuser the control of financial resources or maintains a woman's financial dependence. It includes withholding money for basic necessities (e.g. food, clothing, diapers, medication, transportation, etc.) or for emergencies; forcing her to pay a disproportionate share of household expenses; preventing a woman from getting to work, controlling where she works, not allowing a woman to work, forcing her to work; spending or mismanaging family income, including a woman's earned income and/or savings, and leaving her and the children with little or no money; controlling a woman's spending, including where purchases are made, what is purchased, etc. and forcing her to account for and justify all spending; using credit cards without her permission and destroying her credit rating; obtaining credit or incurring bills in her name without her knowledge or consent; forcing her to turn over benefits payments or entitlements; denying her access to education/training opportunities that may lead to increased earnings or employment; and threatening to make false fraud-related allegations against her.

Spiritual abuse is when an abuser uses a woman's spiritual or religious beliefs to control her. It includes punishing or ridiculing a woman for her religious beliefs; preventing a woman from practice certain beliefs; putting down or attacking her spiritual beliefs; and forcing a woman to join and/or stay in a cult.

Naturally, the primary role of a man is to lead, protect and provide for his family. Playing a positive role transcends beyond family bounds into the community or society. In the past, men would even boast at each other/one another about how well they are treating their wives when they are casually enjoying their drinks. This shows that woman abuse was never condoned even in the past, as such, it must be weeded out all together because it is a bad habit irrespective of whether or not people are in a relationship. It is also degrading and demoralising.

Every family is like an institution just like marriage and is made up of a husband and a wife. There are decisions that must be made in the family. It would thus be appropriate that, as a man, you ensure that decisions are not imposed on your wife. Involve her when the decision is still an idea for her input. If you do not agree with the input she has made, engage her in that regard and provide her with reasons for your position. In that way, she will feel being part of the process and thus take ownership of that decision regardless of the amount her input.

As men or parents, we must always remember that we are role models to our children. Therefore, we need to play a positive role in raising our children as they can copy the wrong habits from us and they could become women abusers. We need to teach them good family values in particular and how to behave in society in general in an effort to ensure nation building.

Women sacrifice more for their children than their counterparts. There are single mothers who raise children while fathers are absent. Some of the fathers neglect their children and women would see to the needs of their children including education which leads a child's professional life.

It must be always remembered and stressed that human beings are made in God's image and they are God's creations. Nobody must be abused since any misunderstanding can be resolved through communication. Men should protect, love and embrace women and children to fulfil their God-given role as head of their families. Therefore, husbands and wives, men and women, partners in relationships, always treat each other with mutual respect to avoid/prevent any form of abuse.

*(An opinion from the labour desk in conjunction with the HR Men's Team
2nd Quarter employee relations article for 2018/19 Financial Year)*