

Chapter **2**

The Woman Abuse Response Protocol

2.1 York Region's Response to Woman Abuse: A Conceptual Model

The manner or approach used by helping professionals when interacting with abused women and their children makes a significant difference in their experience. The approach used with an abused woman is influenced in part by the level of understanding by the professional of the abused woman's behaviour, the dynamics of abuse, and the reinforcement of stereotypes, myths and violence in society. The characteristics of ambivalence, helplessness, and the denial that abused women often display are learned responses that have helped them survive the abuse.

By giving the abuser power, anticipating the abuser's needs, and keeping the peace by sacrificing her needs, the woman learns that these strategies sometimes work to lessen the severity, or duration of, a particular episode, or allow her time to call for help. These are coping mechanisms that the woman has adopted to survive in her situation. They do not in any way suggest that the woman is able to control, stop, or is responsible for the abuser's behaviour.

Another factor that influences the woman's behaviour is the socialization of women. Society teaches women to place the care and needs of their partners and families ahead of their own. As an integral part of the intervention process, women are asked to place their needs first, which goes against everything they have been taught. This process is extremely difficult for abused women, as their sense of self may have been diminished by the abuse.

In addition to working with abused women, it is understood that a major component needed to reach the goal of ending violence against women is working with the abuser. To effectively end the cycle of abuse, there must be a coordinated response from the point of arrest by justice officials, to rehabilitation aided by participation in counseling programs. It is important to continue to enforce the law so that abusers are accountable for their behaviour.

In our efforts to end the cycle of violence, we need to also address the needs of the often forgotten and silent victims of woman abuse – the children. Our response must be a systemic one that includes providing services to all members of the family. In this way, we not only treat existing problems, but also work toward the prevention of future problems.

The York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee is intended to be a collaborative effort of providers of violence against women services and other concerned community organizations. The diagram below depicts our mission to develop and implement a coordinated plan for a comprehensive community-based service system. The model reflects the complex relationships that exist between agencies and the multiple points of entry into and exit from these systems.

The model is woman centred, which means that an agency’s response should be tailored to the client’s experience. The woman is in the centre, and is surrounded by her personal support network, which may include her family, friends and/or community.

The overlapping circles symbolize the coordinated community response and encompasses the sectors within which agencies that provide services operate.

Finally, the outer circle represents the support of the York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee to support the work of the agencies serving women who have experienced abuse.

