

May proclaimed Sexual Assault Prevention Month locally

Orangeville has joined municipalities across the province in observing the month of May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month, to help raise awareness and educate people of all ages on how to prevent something that has become all too common in our society.

According to recent statistics gathered by the Ontario Women's Directorate, it is estimated that one in three Canadian women will experience sexual assault in their adult life, and 39 percent of women report having experienced at least one incidence of sexual assault since the age of 16.

In a presentation at Westside Secondary School Tuesday morning, Kim Kitchen, Clinician and Addiction Specialist at Dufferin Child and Family Services revealed that a staggering 46 percent of females and 36 percent of males in grade 9 have reported that someone has made unwanted sexual comments, harassment, contact or advancements on them in school.

"When you grab someone's butt, or grope them without consent, it can lead to criminal charges, suspension, and eventually expulsion," Mr. Kitchen told the students. "There must be consent from both parties."

In an interview prior to the presentation, Mr. Kitchen explained that one of the biggest concerns is the lack of understanding around consent and what it really means.

"We want to get the message across that just because they don't say no, doesn't mean they are saying yes," he said. "A lot of times, there is something like alcohol involved, where their 'yes' is influenced by the alcohol and someone is taken advantage of."

In more recent years, alcohol has become the number one date rape drug, and has been identified in 80 percent of sexual assault cases.

Sexual assault is defined by the Criminal Code of Canada as sexual contact with another person without that person's consent. But the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment often go beyond sexual contact, especially amidst teens and young adults.

One of the issues is the third party bystander, which Mr. Kitchen described as a person who is either aware of the situation and chooses not to help, or someone who may have been in a position to prevent the assault. This could be anyone from a friend at a party witnessing another friend who is drunk being escorted away by someone, to a cab driver, or a bartender.

With the increase in use of technology such as social media, another form of sexual harassment that has increased exponentially is the sharing of sexually explicit photos, which most often occurs as a method of revenge after a breakup.

"Right now, the number one way teens use to get back after a breakup is by sharing photos," explained Constable Scott Davis of the Orangeville Police. "There is a new law in Canada regarding this. Distributing pictures without the consent of the person in them to share the photo is a criminal offence."

Lynette Pole-Langdon of Family Transition Place also addressed the students during the period-long presentation, speaking about the impact witnessed at FTP, as well as the options available for someone in need of counselling (both boys and girls), as well as the power students have to stop the kind of bullying that comes from the transmission of photos.

"If you find yourself in a situation where you've received these kind of photos, you have the power to stop it," said Ms. Pole-Langdon. "Don't transmit the photo, report it."