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Topic: Violence Against Women

How would the lives of everyday women be changed if they said #MeToo? Would they be applauded like their celebrity counterparts, or be relegated back into the homes of their abusers? While most women are taught to be vigilant of predators lurking in the shadows, we are more likely to be hurt by those closest to us. Violence against women in the DC Area disproportionately affects marginalized populations, negatively impacting those involved and their communities. However, intimate partner violence, which can be physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, can be combated through DC Public Schools implemented prevention programs and continued reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

Firstly, according to UMBC assistant professor Nkiru Nnawulezi's 2018 study, 39% of DC women experience physical, sexual assault, and/or stalking, and 50% reported psychological aggression by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Children raised in families with intimate partner violence are more likely to experience or perpetrate abuse later. Additionally, intimate partner violence often begins before 18. In 2017, the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence revealed that 24% of DCPS middle and high school students reported experiencing physical or dating violence, increasing from 2015. Furthermore, a 2019 report by the District of Columbia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board stated Black women suffer disproportionately from domestic violence while other marginalized communities, who may lack access to system safety nets or may be reticent to turn to public services, also disproportionately fall victim.

Although violence against women is rife, there is a pervasive belief that sexual assault can't happen in relationships. Until recently, intimate partner rape was not considered a crime. However, according to DC Police, 7 in 10 adult rape and sexual assault victims knew their attackers, yet 77% of rapes by a current or prior intimate partner went unreported, exacerbating their invisibility. Sexual assault in a relationship is damaging because victims are pressured to stay, and assault is more likely to be repeated. Rape is not an act of lust or loss of control; it is a crime. Therefore, Congress' reauthorization and expansion of the Violence Against Women Act is vital. First passed in 1994, this act has reduced intimate partner violence and homicides significantly.

Overall, we need action at federal and local levels; there is a jarring lack of prevention programs in DCPS. Abusive behaviors are learned young, so we should proactively address them. DCPS can help prevent intimate partner violence by teaching healthy dating behaviors, creating school-wide prevention events, and revising sexual education curriculum. Violence against women crosses all geographic, cultural, socioeconomic, and racial boundaries society has strategically placed. So when are we going to value the lives and safety of our women over the pride and aggression of our men?

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