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Study looks into sibling violence

by Monica MacKinnon

Society may be too accepting of sibling violence as a normal part of growing up, a recent study cautions.

Low participation in a five month study "Sibling Violence: A Family Secret" could be an indication of how difficult it is for people to address violence in families, Jean Crosby of Naomi Society said.

"Sibling violence, including physical aggression and emotional abuse, is often considered normal," she said, "until there is an extreme incident and then it's addressed as an isolated incident and not seen as part of a continuum."

Sibling violence surveys were distributed to and completed by 160 high school students from Antigonish town and county.

Most of these young people reported experiencing verbally aggressive or emotionally abusive interactions with siblings.

These behaviours are often directed at physical appearance and degrade, humiliate and lower the self-esteem of siblings.

Crosby said this form of abuse is often tolerated.

Only 20 of 200 surveys distributed to parents were completed in the August to December study last year.

Parents and youth were not interested in discussion groups about the issue and only one group of youth agreed to talk about sibling violence. The report notes that the discussion was difficult to facilitate.

In their written responses, students say sibling conflicts are a normal part of family life and are not serious.

Research shows that siblings engaged in violent behaviour are more likely to carry this behaviour into their peer and adult relationships.

The study also found that how parents resolve their conflicts directly affects how siblings resolve conflicts.

Naomi Society and the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre organized the five-month study with \$12,000 in funding from the Community Mobilization Program. This intergovernmental program is designed to address root causes of crime.

Anyone interested in the report can contact Naomi Society at 863-3807.

The Casket