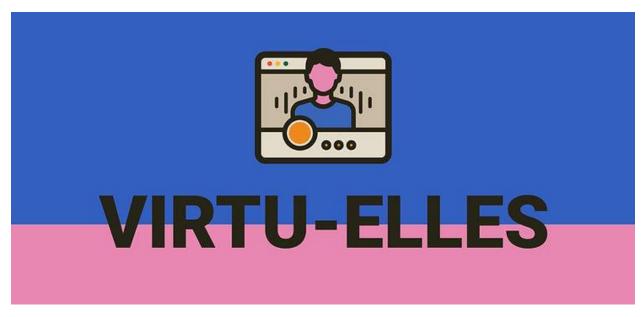Oct 4, 2021

COPA's new cyber-violence prevention program

Virtu-elles is COPA's new cyber-violence prevention program, created with the support of the [Canadian Women's Foundation](#). It is a program for post-secondary students who identify as or are perceived as women. In this workshop, participants will gain a better understanding of cyber-violence; its impacts, the various forms it can take, the dynamics of power and control, misinformation, and the nature of gender-based violence.

Clarification about the myth of the stranger is an example of what participants will learn in this workshop. Our commonly held belief is that strangers are the potential aggressors in gendered violence. However, in reality 80% of assaults are committed by people known to those who are assaulted. Online too, cyber-violence is very often committed by someone known to the person targeted by them. Violence against women and children is shrouded in secrecy and perpetuated by the silence and myths that surround it. In order to prevent this violence, it is crucial to break the silence and dispel these myths.

Our society has many rules about how to avoid assault; these are the do's and don'ts we have learned from our families, schools, and the media. We all know them. But in truth, these rules are not based on the reality of sexual assault, including the cyber-sexual assault that happens online, and thus they don't support us with real information about what we can do to keep ourselves safe. And a major problem with these rules is that although they may offer ways to avoid the assault (which are often ineffective), they do not instruct us as to what we can do if we do find ourselves in an assault situation. Participants of the **Virtu-elles** workshop will have the opportunity to acquire tools for prevention that are based on

mutual aid and empowerment strategies, and they will develop the capacity to assess and respond appropriately when they find themselves in a situation of cyber-violence.

Violence against women has been exposed as a serious and widespread social problem for many years, however, there has been a real lack of information about how to prevent it. Cyber-violence is simply a new frontier of violence against women, an extension of this social problem and not a brand-new problem. The aggressor who seeks to control and dominate a woman has new tools at his disposal to do so, and this presents new issues and challenges.This program has its origins in a popular COPA program called Instincts, an assault prevention and self-defense program for women that aims to empower women by increasing their choices and their capacity to resist abuse.

It is estimated that 73% of women are abused online worldwide (United Nations Commission on Broadband for Digital Development, 2015). And cyberviolence is always evolving. New websites, programs and bullying tactics are constantly emerging, and the expectation that women must learn on their ownto navigate these spaces is in and of itself oppressive. In developing Virtu-elles, COPA is responding to this need for women to be able to prevent and respond to cyberviolence.

The objectives of these workshops are:

● To gain a better understanding of the issue of cyber-violence: its impact, forms, dynamics of power and control, misinformation, and its gendered nature,

● To develop a vision of cyber-violence prevention based on collective solidarity and empowerment of women in all their diversity,

● To build the capacity to assess a situation of cyberviolence and choose how to respond to it in order to regain power, and to

● Share and exchange in a safe space, recognize survivors if they choose to disclose, and facilitate access to appropriate services as needed.

Virtual spaces offer incredible opportunities such as access to community, safe spaces, critical content about sexism and racism, positive content related to body image and sexuality, and tools to express oneself and develop as a digital media creator. COPA hopes that these workshops will empower women and uphold their right to be safe, strong, and free in virtual spaces.

We ask that the tools we share in this workshop be kept confidential, as we would like to ensure that only those who identify or are perceived as women have access to this information. In this way, those who need them can use them without fear that potential aggressors may already be aware of these tactics.

COPA is grateful to the Canadian Women's Foundation for not only funding the development of Virtu-elles, but also for allowing us to have offered it free of charge for a limited time to post-secondary institutions in Ontario. This program will eventually be available in English and French across Canada.

If you are interested in more information about or scheduling Virtu-elles, Instincts, or any of our programs in your organization, please email us at info@infocopa.com or call 416-466-7490. Or visit https://www.nationalcopa.com/

Reference

UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development. (2015). Cyber Violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. The Broadband Commission for Digital Development