

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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HEARINGS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
NINETY-FIFTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION

H.R. 7927 and H.R. 8948

TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
AND WELFARE TO ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM TO DE-  
VELOP METHODS OF PREVENTION AND TREATMENT RELAT-  
ING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

HEARINGS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,  
ON MARCH 16 AND 17, 1978

Use of the Committee on Education and Labor  
CARL D. PERKINS, *Chairman*



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VICTIMIZATION IN THE HOME:  
AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
WITH SOME SUGGESTIONS ON FILLING UNMET NEEDS

Testimony for the  
SELECT EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE  
EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE

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VICTIMIZATION IN THE HOME:  
AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
WITH SOME SUGGESTIONS ON FILLING UNMET NEEDS

Representative George Miller and Members of the Committee: thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to address this Committee. As a research sociologist who has conducted a study on woman battering/domestic violence for the past two years, I hope that what I say to you today will be of some assistance regarding appropriate legislation needed to address this serious social problem. I am also here as a representative of the Sociologists for Women in Society. This national organization, composed of 1500 members has addressed the issue of battered women and unanimously adopted the following resolution at its February 3-5, 1978 meeting in Cleveland, Ohio:

BE IT RESOLVED: that the Sociologists for Women in Society supports legislation pending before Congress which would appropriate funds for services and analysis to address the social problem of domestic violence.... SWS supports the overall concept of both these bills, and is particularly concerned that these funds reach citizen groups at the community level who have done the pioneering work to assist victims of domestic violence. FURTHER: SWS adopts the position that, because available scientific evidence strongly indicates that victims of spousal violence are overwhelmingly women and their children, the pseudo issue of battered husbands must not be used to distract from the salience of the issue of battered women. We maintain that the relatively powerless and socially disadvantaged spouses are the ones who are most in need of the services called for in

these bills, and we are concerned that the limited funds allocated should not be siphoned from services for female victims and their children, and misplaced into services for a comparatively miniscule and questionable number of male victims.

Research to date has been extremely limited and there are very few empirical studies that have done anything more than scratch the surface. We have almost no concrete statistics to offer because this is a particularly private crime committed behind closed doors. Most statistics quoted and reguoted have emanated from a few sources who have tried to estimate the extent and severity of the problem. Even those who have based estimates on police records have had to extrapolate instances of spouse abuse from other forms of domestic disturbance such as "man with gun," sibling assault, etc. In addition, even if records had clearly differentiated between spousal violence and other forms of domestic violence, police records still would not provide us with any reliable measurement of the extent of the problem other than the number of cases which come to the attention of law enforcement authorities. As we know from other crimes of violence against persons, the vast majority of such crimes never become an official part of the record. The FBI, for example, estimates that only one out of ten actual rapes is reported.

The only large-scale sociological research survey to date involving a representative random sample of married and cohabitating couples has severe limitations. It has added to our pool of knowledge about the severity, but very little about the extent of the problem, and has left many more questions unanswered. As the study's principal investigator Murray Straus (1977:7,8) points out, there are a number of methodological problems inherent in the study itself,

such as the restriction to intact cohabitating couples, restriction of focus to violence in the year prior to interview, and the use of retrospective self-report--all of which lead to under-reporting and thus to under-estimation (Pagelow, 1978:3-5).

Another major difficulty is that the design of the study was too broad because it attempted to measure multiple forms of violence occurring within the family. Spouse abuse was only one of many types of violence that were numerically tabulated. It was merely a category alongside sibling violence and intergenerational violence--which includes child abuse and abuse of parents by children. While the study's scope is appropriately sociological in looking at diverse forms of violence in society, in contrast to the more narrow study of individuals that is appropriate for psychological and psychiatric investigations, the result may be that we have merely had confirmed what most of us have known all along: we live in an extremely violent society. As an experienced photographer prior to becoming a sociologist, I suggest that a wide angle lens was used when a telephoto lens was appropriate for the job--that is, if we want to discover the causes and prevention of spouse abuse we need to focus on that specific issue. Our political leaders have already responsibly addressed the serious crimes of child abuse and juvenile delinquency and are attempting to guard the human rights and safety of the aged, including elderly parents. Each of these issues is serious and requires the concern of citizens and legislators alike, but the major focus of legislation under consideration of this Committee today is spouse abuse.

We have only recently become aware of the phenomenon of persons

battering their spouses and this is the issue about which we need much more information. We already know that violence is pervasive in our society and is an underlying thread that connects all these crimes together. It goes without saying that if we were to entirely rid our society of violence tomorrow, then there would be no more child abuse, sibling violence, abuse of parents or spouse battering --in other words: domestic violence. However, total nonviolence is not likely to occur in the next five, fifty, or even five hundred years without a complete restructuring of our entire social system.

We also know there is a correlation between child abuse and spouse abuse. But I, for one, see a far stronger correlation between violent crimes against women than correlations between the various crimes within the family (Pagelow, 1977). For example, there are stronger similarities between the crimes of rape and woman battering than there are between sibling violence and woman battering. When we look for causes, can we suggest that motivation is the same when an adult abuses either tiny children or aged parents? It seems highly unlikely.

For these reasons, the study I have conducted has narrowed the focus and looked specifically at spouse abuse. It is unique in several ways. First, it designates and accepts victims of spouse abuse as the real experts. Respondents were not subjected to personality inventories or psychological tests--the individual psychopathological model was not employed. Victims provided demographic and other descriptive data about themselves and their spouses, their immediate environment, their battering experiences, their attempts to seek help, and the responses they received from law enforcement and social service agents. Second, a variety of methodologies were employ-

ed including historiography, in depth interview, observation, participant observation, and self administered questionnaire. Field interviews were also conducted with agents of law enforcement, the judiciary, medical and social services, and the clergy.

While there are limitations to the generalizability of the study due to self-report and non-random sample selection, the employment of a variety of research techniques provided other distinct advantages. For example, there was some verification of data for the development of a substantial number of reliable case histories as well as more intensive exploration of the dynamics underlying the interaction between spouses. The dual investigation of both the victims and the societal agents most likely to come in contact with victims revealed real or perceived options--or lack of them--of the victims to effect change in their lives for the prevention or control of the violence.

One side effect of this particular study has been the sensitization of persons in a variety of social institutions to the plight of victims. For instance, when any researcher asks hospital emergency room personnel questions regarding both established policy and personal attitudes and their treatment of patients, it becomes clear that these doctors and nurses frequently did not maximize their efforts on the behalf of their patients because they harbored certain stereotypic negative impressions of women beaten by men they love. Additionally, the study has shown that prosecutors mentioned "putting the screws" to victims of domestic assault because they did not want to begin a case that might not carry through to trial and conviction of the accused because of plaintiff failure to press charges; yet upon questioning, they admit that they cannot offer the potential

witness adequate protection against an avenging spouse in the pre-trial interim (Pagelow, 1976). Also, one particular judge had twice awarded custody of male children to the fathers who had battered their wives. This judge refused to grant an interview in connection with the study. It is hoped that even the act of refusing to be interviewed regarding legal aspects of domestic violence may have given him reason to question his own position.

Although the more than one hundred questionnaires in this investigation were largely obtained from victims who had stayed at one of the shelters in California, at least twenty-five percent were volunteers from all parts of the United States. Many of these individuals had never gone to a refuge for battered women and their children. This provided a sample base with a wide range from upper middle class to lower working class respondents, avoiding the working class bias inherent in samples obtained from police, social services, or shelter sources only. All other research techniques were employed in shelters in the United States, England, and Ireland, and the entire sample of battered spouses were females. One California shelter in operation for over two years has never received a request for assistance from a battered man, while the Emergency Shelter Program (ESP) in Hayward, California, reports that far less than one percent of all calls for assistance come from men. There can be little doubt that at least some males are the victims of domestic violence, but for a variety of reasons outlined elsewhere, men are proportionately far fewer in number, their actual physical danger and need for safe haven is far less, and their access to resources for alternatives is also proportionately far greater (Pagelow, 1978).

Because much of this study has been conducted within shelters,

it has also provided me with the opportunity to learn first-hand about the problems and needs of victims both from the viewpoint of the researcher and from the viewpoint of the grass roots service providers. I probably have a better understanding than most researchers of the frustrations, goals, and needs of victims, shelter staffs, and traditional service providers, because my work required that I build rapport and close communication with all three groups. It has not been research composed of tests conducted in a sterile lab, it has not been tests or questionnaires administered by paid interviewers, nor has it been research conducted behind the ivy covered walls of academia. Instead, it has been an exploratory study designed and carried out personally in the real world of the people involved.

As a result, I have listened to policemen complain about how dangerous domestic disturbance calls are for them, and wondered if they could ever imagine how much more dangerous they appear to unarmed women who weigh on the average fifty pounds less and stand almost half a foot shorter than their spouses, according to my data. I have sat in courtrooms watching the administration of justice in accordance with our man-made laws and witnessed middle class women and their children reduced to below poverty levels, while they trembled in fear at being in the same room with their abusive spouses. I have tried to soothe the fears and pain of a non-English speaking pregnant and beaten Chicana while I held her sick ten month old baby. I have been a volunteer at a filled shelter who had to tell an emergency room nurse that I could locate no place in the entire county where she could send her patient and three daughters for safety. I have sat at a kitchen table, laughing and talking with women

at a shelter in Dublin, Ireland listening to their experiences with violent mates and unresponsive officials, and realized that these are issues that cross all boundaries. Despite unspeakably substandard living conditions and dangerous overcrowding of shelters, women in the British Isles--like their American counterparts--expressed the common idea that they were happy to be in those deplorable surroundings, because they offered the one thing they needed most--safety.

Safety is perhaps the most important, but certainly not the only benefit that shelters offer battered women and their children; they offer much more. Safety is extremely important--it is the resource not available to victims until very recently, even when victims were fortunate enough to have understanding friends and relatives willing and able to take them into their homes. Years before the recent public concern with woman battering, I knew a young wife whose parents gave her shelter; the woman's father was killed by her furious husband who demanded her return. Friends and relatives must frequently withdraw offers of assistance when they and their families realize that they are in personal danger too.

Safety is of primary importance for another reason. Even when police officers sincerely wanted to intervene in domestic disturbances to protect the victims, many have been reluctant to arrest the perpetrators. They knew that the length of time the accused would be detained was very short, and the women would be in even greater jeopardy later. It is usually only a matter of hours between arrest and freedom on bail for the average citizen. Prosecutors who want to follow through are painfully aware that they cannot carry out their official role until the victims and children can be in a safe

place unknown to the accused. In a very important way, if officials are serious in their desire to uphold the law, protect the rights and lives of citizens, and to obtain equal justice under the law, then shelters are the best assurance that these officials can carry out their duties properly.

One of the other very important benefits shelters provide is a supportive atmosphere in which victims meet other women who were also abused by their spouses. It is the first time for most battered women that they have ever been able to discuss their private humiliation, fear, and pain. This is the best possible "therapy" these victims can possibly received, for sometimes only within hours of their arrival, a much more positive self-image begins to emerge. The Director of WomenShelter in Long Beach, California said, "It's almost miraculous the way some of these women begin to bloom," while the Director of ESP in Hayward, California said, "Within hours many begin to walk taller."

But for those communities still struggling to establish shelters, such as Riverside County, California, where all that is available to them today is short term haven in the private homes of Good Samaritans, the women do not have this tremendous advantage of communal housing. Isolated victims do not have the opportunity to make contact with other victims like themselves they can both admire and respect.

Other benefits offered by shelters for battered women and their children are the on-site availability of representatives from existing community service organizations, the expertise of shelter staffs to acquaint victims with traditional, established community services, and their uses. For example, even if a victim is upper middle

class based on her spouse's income, many of these women flee their homes with nothing more than their children and the clothes they are wearing. Such individuals have absolutely no idea how they can even obtain enough food to live, but an experienced staff goes to work immediately to get emergency food and cash from the welfare system to tide them over.

Most shelters provide a wide variety of counseling services: legal, employment, educational, and optional psychological counseling. Many of these benefits are offered within the shelter itself, most frequently provided by concerned citizens, both professional and paraprofessional, who volunteer their particular skills. Housing or rehousing is frequently a serious problem that is far more difficult for an unskilled individual to solve than for someone from an established shelter to which housing authorities often are more responsive.

Children, too, receive a range of supportive services. Coming from a violent, frightening, and painful family situation in which they had no alternatives but to endure, these children frequently do not even know how to relate to others in a nonviolent milieu. Leaving home (often suddenly in the middle of the night), their friends, and all that is familiar to them can be a terrifying experience for any child. Reactions vary, usually they settle in very quickly, making new friends and adjusting to new surroundings. Other times the damages from turmoil, tension, and fear make it difficult for a child to adjust. Many have witnessed one parent beating the other, some have only heard screams that woke them in the night, but whatever the case, a few have behavior problems and/or deep-rooted fears. Almost all shelters set high priorities in con-

cerns for the children. Even the most financially-desperate shelters try to provide an indoor playroom, an outdoor play area, and to obtain the most skilled child care specialists. Although some community child guidance centers have been less than enthusiastic to provide services for "transient" children, shelters have exerted sufficient pressure to convince some to provide their specialized expertise. The best help for these displaced children, however, seems to come from the sharing and caring atmosphere within shelters, and the freedom from fear.

The typical philosophy underlying the best-managed shelters I have visited is a non-judgemental acceptance of victims as people who are in crisis. The problem is identified as one that she has, not one that she is. In other words, the "sickness" label is rejected, and she is viewed as a mature adult capable of making her own decisions. In isolation, she may not have felt she had any options but to endure years of abuse. By connecting her into the community network of social services, options are presented to her of which she usually was not aware. Organizations that are unresponsive to individuals who don't know the "system" become responsive when staff persons serve an advocacy role. When a battered woman receives such kinds of social support, she is then able to assume control over her own life and make her own free choice. Safety, social support, information, contact with existing community services, and advocacy--these are what shelters mean to battered women and their children.

Hopefully, other persons here today will express in detail some of the unmet needs of victims of domestic violence. Thus far I have elaborated on the many positive achievements of shelters and their

services, but unmet needs are many and serious. In the first place, the few shelters that exist are only a tiny fraction of the many that are needed. There should be at least one shelter in every geographic area with a population of 100,000. When I think of a city as large as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that has only one sheltering community which houses a maximum of twenty women and their children, I realize the magnitude of the problem. Either there must be many, many more shelters, or they must be made larger to accommodate more people--otherwise we will continue to turn away victims who have no alternatives to returning to the batterer and more abuse. Rural areas need to be served, too, so that any woman subjected to battering can be channeled to safe housing.

If we are serious about the prevention of domestic violence, it is important to note that shelters serve as a preventative in two major ways: the short-term effect is obviously in saving human beings from further abuse (and almost all researchers have noted that uninterrupted violence tends to escalate in intensity and frequency). By giving victims safe haven, we prevent further beatings and even homicides. The long-term effect that could be received from the greater availability of shelters is to prevent some men from going too far. By this I mean that it is likely that many men would not batter their spouses if they knew that by doing so, they stand a very good chance of losing their power to control them.

Once a woman has left a shared home and received community provided shelter elsewhere, the power to control and dominate her has changed. Many women return home but conditions are never quite the same. Sometimes women return after stipulation that their spouses receive certain kinds of counseling or on other terms, but the pri-

vacy of the act of battering has ceased. The violence has become a matter of record somewhere outside the walls of the domicile, and the battering spouse must realize that there are people in the community who stand ready to intercede on behalf of the women. Many men simply take it for granted that they have a right, even an obligation, to control their wives and they are honestly shocked when they are informed that what they were doing is a crime which will not be tolerated. The existence of a nearby shelter may in itself prove to be enough deterrence to prevent such violence. Availability of shelter alone may tip the balance of power to the extent that some men, knowing they may lose their spouses and children through community intervention (as well as their reputations), will refrain from the violence of which they are capable.

At the present time, however, shelters are too few, too small, and too impoverished. The constant struggle by any grass roots group to obtain funding from the very beginning continues on after shelters become established. Fund-raising drains time and energy desperately needed in other areas such as community education, advocacy, personnel training, and building networks of cooperating existing agencies. Not only does it take vast amounts of time and energy to obtain money with which to operate, but accountability can present other crippling disadvantages. Private donations sometimes carry restrictions on services shelters may offer (such as abortion counseling) and public funding often requires elaborate record-keeping and unreasonably tight controls on how the money may be spent. I have seen volunteers reach into their own pockets to help out: in one case, because a mother had to take her child to a medical clinic, and there was no cash available for travel incident-

als. More frequently, it is the residents who help each other out.

This country spends billions of dollars each year on crime prevention programs, mental hospitals, prisons, and studying juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, and criminology. Now I believe it is time that we begin to allocate enough money to get at the root of many of these serious social problems. Almost everyone in this country grows up in a nuclear family unit, and much of what they learn there carries over into adulthood, which is then transmitted to the next generation and so on. If the home is warm, loving, and secure, the potential is good that adults who emerge will pass on these benefits to persons in their own social environment. But if there is violence, terror, and insecurity, the home becomes a breeding ground for dangerous and destructive behavior.

If we could trace out over generations the effects of unhappy and violent homes upon citizens in this country today, we would undoubtedly find that much of the money we are now spending is destined to treat the effects of domestic violence. Juvenile delinquency is a good example: many children achieve this label by the act of running away from home. Have we checked to see how many youngsters leave home because they can no longer endure seeing their mothers being regularly beaten? How much aberrant behavior in society is a result of what goes on behind closed doors of homes? How many absentee hours does this nation pay for because of domestic violence the night before? How many women are confined to mental institutions because their minds withdrew from the horror of everyday living with their spouses? How many suicides and murders are a direct result of violence in the family? The list seems endless.

We may never know the total direct and indirect costs to this

nation, but many of us believe they are overwhelming. We do know that violence is pervasive in this society, that spouse abuse crosses all socioeconomic class lines, age, race, ethnic groups, and religions. Directly or indirectly, all of us are affected by it, and we are already paying heavily for its effects. Let us no longer treat these serious social ills with band-aids--let us begin prevention now. And in the American tradition, let us not make a half-hearted effort, but rather, give it our best and make a sincere effort to prevent violence in the home.

My suggestions to this Committee are to exert every effort to guard that legislation approved by this Congress provides the most help (and that means money) that reaches those who need it the most--the service providers at the local level. Community-based groups who began the struggle to assist victims and to educate fellow citizens are the ones who have demonstrated the desire to help, the sensitivity, the dedication, the foresight, and the way to attack the problem. Pioneers in a field that remained ignored by almost all professions, grass roots people were the ones who, through long struggle, developed the expertise to assist victims of domestic violence. While a wide range of traditional organizations already existed for the purpose of meeting community needs, most were not responsive to, nor even aware of, the problems of woman battering until grass roots organizations began to spring up to address the problem. As in the long-standing problem of rape, special problems and unmet needs of victims largely went ignored until feminists began their push to raise national consciousness. In many communities across this land, despite the massive publicity on woman battering, many traditional service organizations are still running "business as

usual," remaining unresponsive and uneducated about the problem.

It would be a grave disservice to the thousands of dedicated citizens who gave so much, only to let them find that when funding finally became available, sophisticated and politically adept agencies or groups suddenly take over. Funding should only be made the responsibility of a federal administrative agency that will be responsive to needs at the local community level. We need to establish a Division for Women that will have a staff sensitized and responsive to women and their specific needs. Funding should be channeled through a new division, and the needs of battered women must not be subsumed with any agency whose primary focus is children or the family. We must finally recognize that women are not children--their needs are distinct and must be recognized as different. Women are also more than merely family members--they are people--adult individuals, and we want them recognized as complete human beings, not merely submerged under, or a part of, other categories.

Research, of course, must be carried out if we desire better understanding of the multiple problems of victims and their assaulters. While some small proportion of this legislation's funding will probably be designated for follow-up and evaluation research, I propose that a relatively large share of these funds be allocated directly to shelters for the following reasons. First, subject populations are readily available who can provide data. Second, administrators of shelters are aware of some specific research questions not now being addressed by the scientific, university-based community. Three, at the present time, because of extremely limited funds, minimal or no follow-up can be conducted. This is a very serious need that

must have attention. Such research would, in fact, provide another support service for victims by letting them know that lines of communication are still open even after they leave the shelters. Thus, research grants directly to shelters would provide a much needed service for victims, fulfill a scientific need for understanding, and give policy makers informed guidance for future directions.

Traditional research grants are available now to social scientists who may continue to propose studies through a variety of funding sources. Some suggestions for needed improvements are that: first, there should be better and wider geographic distribution than has historically been the case. Second, allowances should be made for use of a variety of methodologies in differing levels of research, e.g., small group interaction, large scale survey, etc. Three, there should be some community-based research, which both helps educate the community and may serve to investigate specialized needs of shelter service providers; their input is necessary and important. Four, research should be conducted in a variety of geographically distinct communities, so that findings may be compared for possible commonalities (Hampton, 1978).

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I strongly urge you to study all these recommendations carefully and to do all in your power to see that legislation approved by this Congress is designed in the best interest of the most people. I hope there will be a day when shelters and other emergency services for victims of spouse abuse are no longer needed. We cannot do much about violence in the childhoods of today's adult victims and assaulters, but we can break the cycle of violence for present and future generations by opening doors of fully staffed residential shelters

for battered women and their children now. Let them be operated by the pioneers who know how to operate them best, and let these paraprofessionals share their expertise by teaching other groups how to serve their own communities.

Please allocate sufficient funds so that the residents can have facilities and services that give them a sense of dignity and self-worth, rather than the depressing poverty I have seen so often. I want to be able some day to forget what I have seen in some shelters. I particularly want to be able to forget the frail mother I met last week who was trying desperately to find a way to transport her son across town to his school for the blind. Transportation that had been provided before ceased due to their relocation into a shelter. One problem was to obtain the cash for public transportation to take him there. Her fears were twofold: if she did not get her son to his school, a social worker would define her as an unfit mother because of her son's truancy, and on the other hand, if she did, her battering spouse might be at the school waiting for her. I also want to forget that when I left California, two women and three small children who had stayed the maximum number of days in a shelter were all living in one room of the cheapest motel in the area, because they could not obtain a house or apartment to rent.

I know I will never forget the gentle woman who came to a shelter on crutches looking for a new life; she died several weeks later when her incurable disease, exacerbated by beatings, took its toll.

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