

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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

SECOND SESSION

ON

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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victims information bureau
of suffolk

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION

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Although domestic violence, specifically spouse abuse, has existed for many thousands of years, it has only recently come to the attention of the nation as an issue worthy of research, intervention and services. Indeed, we have just begun to see victims of battering as a group requiring special protection under the law. Local, state and federal efforts must be concentrated on developing a network of workable alternatives for the victims of domestic violence.

The police, courts and social service agencies have long realized the importance of support and intervention when dealing with juveniles who are the objects of intra-familial violence. Few of these agencies, however, have ever given adults the same level of consideration when they are the victims of violence within the family unit. The family may receive special attention for the benefit of its juvenile members. However, when children are not directly involved agencies do not have the same level of concern or expertise for the protection of the victim and creation of stability within the family unit.

Underlying the lack of services are several assumptions such as (1) when people reach legal majority they are capable of protecting themselves from assaults by family members; (2) to intervene would destroy the family unit; (3) what happens between related adults, short of murder, is not the concern of the general society but is a matter better left between the members.

These assumptions are false and serve to hinder proper services being made available. Traditional agencies have been reluctant to intervene in on-going relationships between adults and this reluctance only victimizes the abused again.

It is imperative that we understand and accept the fact that spouse abuse is a crime whose primary victims are women, 96% according to the most credible studies. Sexist attitudes about women result, as we all know, in discrimination against women in general. However, the effect of sexism creates further suffering when women become victims of spousal abuse. Pervasive cultural attitudes preclude female victims from services since they are perceived as masochistic, guilty of provoking the assaults or even enjoying being beaten. Legally, spousal immunity is a common feature in many of our states' laws. In essence, a wife beater is given legal and social freedom to assault his wife.

Because spouse abuse has yet to be properly addressed it is difficult to have an accurate estimate of the extent of the problem in America. But available data does indicate that spouse abuse is wide spread. A recent report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice stated that "Family altercations... are probably the greatest cause of homicides in the United States." F.B.I. statistics show that nearly two thirds of aggravated assaults which occur in the United States involve relatives. In a series of in-depth case studies Dr. Richard Gelles found that

56% of couples studied use physical force on each other. Dr. Levinger found that "40% of working class women and 23% of middle class women seeking divorce mentioned 'physical force' as a reason for seeking the divorce." Further data indicates that 25% of men and nearly 18% of women approve of slapping a wife under certain conditions. Dr. Murray Straus and Dr. Susan Steinmetz have completed a number of studies which indicate that spouse abuse crosses all racial, religious, economic, geographic and social lines with the same level of occurrence. Even though the data is limited and in its infancy there is strong argument that spouse abuse and other forms of family violence are prevalent and have major consequences for the victims, the families and the community.

The cost of family violence to individuals and society is difficult to calculate. Police departments receive family violence calls more than any other. Over half of the police in this country injured on the job are injured at a family disturbance. More than 32% of the police killed in this country are killed responding to family violence calls. Since the police are only able to respond to the symptoms, they are called again and again to the same household. Dr. James Bannon, Commander of the Detroit Police Department, noted that family violence calls to the police are usually repeated a number of times before any concrete action is taken "...so that only where the injury was extreme or the offence repeated would a warrant have been issued, you can readily see why the women ultimately take the law into their hands or despair

of finding relief at all."

One must also consider the external costs to the criminal justice and social service system. Valuable time and money are spent in probation intake, probation investigation, probation supervision, family court, criminal court, medical treatment, aid to dependant children, welfare, foster care, child protective services, legal aid, community mental health, as well as personal loss in terms of medical treatment, private legal services, time off the job and destruction of private property. This does not even account for the emotional cost to the victim, the children and the abuser. Nor does it consider the price in terms of the family's alienation from its community, the shattering of belief in society's ability to protect its citizens and the continual erosion and eventual destruction of family life.

The victims of family violence present a very complex set of problems. The battering and violence have usually existed for a number of years, often since the beginning of the marriage. The violence usually begins at the first stressful point in the marriage: the honeymoon, first pregnancy, first child, first job loss or first job advancement. The abuse and violence rarely ends with one or two assaultive incidents but continues as long as no outside services are available. The violence does not involve a single traumatic experience but a series of traumatic experiences that will develop into a pattern of behavior on the part of the abuser as well as the victim. Often this pattern becomes a

"way of life" and once a way of life, major intervention and well coordinated services are the only hope of freeing the family from this destructive pattern. Without appropriate services the family is doomed to continue this pattern and damage will result, not only to the adult members but to the children as well.

We learn how to be adults by watching our parents. When violence is presented to the child as an acceptable mechanism for resolution of conflict, the child begins to accept violence as normal. There is a positive correlation between one's exposure to violence as a child and one's attitude and acceptance of violence as an adult. Children exposed to violence in their homes are adversely affected in a number of ways. They commonly experience and are prone to delinquent behavior, poor learning development, poor school performance, and poor socialization. If violence is learned and accepted during childhood, it is more likely to become a part of the behavior pattern for the adult. We have ample evidence from child abuse research to indicate that these conditions do arise when a child is the direct recipient of violent behavior. However, we are only now coming to grips with the fact that children who live in violent homes, even though they may never be the direct recipient of violence, are as prone to exhibit poor development indicators as their counterparts who are actually being assaulted by their parents.

If children learn that violence is acceptable during their early developmental years, they are prone to using violence as their model of behavior when they become adults. This model of behavior then becomes a primary aspect in the continuum of a cycle of inter-generational violence.

If we are to assist future generations in escaping this cycle of violence we must have services available to the victims, the children and the abuser. Traditionally, services available to the victims of family violence are inadequate. Intervention by these agencies has usually addressed factors which provoked the most recent incident and rarely addressed are the underlying causes of that incident. Most service providers, while well trained to cope with family violence symptoms must limit their attention to a particular incident and are not adequately equipped to deal with the causes of that violence. In order to properly address family violence special services must be made available to the victims, children and the abusers. In addition, special training should be provided to existing practitioners to teach them how best to work with victims of family violence.

One example of a program which is providing many of these services now is the Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Inc. The Bureau is located in the eastern most county of Long Island, New York. The area served is predominately middle and upper middle class. The area relies heavily on metropolitan New York City and the defense industry for much of the income of the county's 1.3 million residents.

The Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Inc. began in June of 1976 as a community based, autonomous victims assistance program which is funded through the Suffolk County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. V.I.B.S. provides crisis intervention, individual, group, couple, and family counseling to victims of spouse abuse and sexual assault. In addition to counseling the Bureau offers advocacy to assist the victim as they move through the various criminal justice, social service, and health care systems. Since beginning operation we have received more than 9000 calls on our hotline and have seen 875 clients in the counseling center; 96% of the callers and clients are victims of spouse abuse.

In offering services to victims of spouse abuse we found that the vast majority of the battered women we saw did not want to end their marriages but wanted to remain with their husbands, without the violence. To assist our clients in reaching her goals we had no alternative but to draw her husband into counseling. Because no one else was offering this alternative to battered wives we had to develop a treatment model to work with the victims and their abusing spouse. The Clinical Director of the Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk developed a model of treatment, unique to the field. By using this model with 135 couples, in counseling for three months, we have seen the violent behavior eliminated in every case. By any societal measurement the marriages are not what they could be, but the violence has been eliminated.

In addition to direct services V.I.B.S. has conducted research, community education and training programs. The research has looked at the extent and attitudes of spouse abuse in Suffolk County, New York. Through that research we have been able to accurately project that there are 25,000 abused spouses in this county, 96% of whom are battered wives. These results fall in line with a study recently completed, on a national basis, by Dr. Murray Straus.

The V.I.B.S. public education component has reached more than 15,000 county residents and has been heard on every major radio and television network in the New York Metropolitan area. The training component has developed and participated in innovative training of police, probation, court, district attorney, and hospital personnel in how best to deal with victims of spouse abuse and sexual assault.

Our experience has taught us much about spouse abuse, the victims, the abusers and the children. And that experience has also raised some questions about the legislation now being considered by this committee. As the first national piece of legislation to be produced, it must be applauded. However, I must raise some concerns.

- 1 There is no question that research is badly needed but the proposed legislation appears to provide too much of the limited resources for research.
- 2 There is a desperate need for direct service programs throughout the country to offer assistance to today's

and future victims of family violence. This legislation all but ignores direct service programs.

- 3 Through this legislation, very little money will be available on state and local levels. Applications will be heard on a national basis, thus eliminating allocations which can accommodate local needs.
- 4 None of the funds are earmarked for training or re-training practitioners and service delivery personnel on how to adequately work with victims of spouse abuse, their children and the abusing spouse.

With these concerns in mind I would, therefore, respectfully recommend that the committee consider changing the present legislation or initiating new legislation which would:

- 1 Be housed under the Office of Child, Youth and Families rather than under the National Institute of Mental Health.
- 2 Make the greatest portion of direct service funds available on state and local levels.
- 3 Make a clear distinction between the amount of money available to governmental agencies and private, not-for-profit autonomous agencies.

- 4 Provide a greater portion of the resources to direct service programs while still allowing money for research, but a smaller percentage.
- 5 Provide a portion of the resources for training and retraining existing service's personnel in how to work successfully with the victims of spouse abuse and their families.
- 6 Create economic penalties for states unwilling to make spouse abuse an illegal act. This could closely mirror present statutes which penalize states that do not de-institutionalize dispositions for young persons as status offenders.
- 7 Develop a national and regional resource centers which would provide information along with technical assistance to programs working with victims of spouse abuse as well the community at large.

The very fact that national attention is now being focused on the issue of spouse abuse and family violence is the first step in providing the needed services. Until we make an active effort to address these issues people will suffer, future generations will be scarred and we as a society will be at fault for giving sanction by not acting.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity and your attention.

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