



The Phyllis Schlafly Report

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Family Violence Is Everyone's Concern

"The family and family life are central to our American heritage. The family bonds give us an anchor in the past, as well as hope for the future. It is within the family that tradition is created, individuals grow, and faith is nurtured." So said President Ronald Reagan in 1984.

Stability in millions of homes in this country is severely threatened by the crime which flourishes in the shadows of secrecy. For generations, family violence has been the crime no one sees, talks about, or acts upon until a tragedy occurs.

While the main source of fear for most people is violent crime by strangers, a great many Americans find that their own family members are the source of their most intense fear. They do not have to step outside their own houses to be abused, assaulted, maimed or killed.

This is particularly true for many women and children. Usually it is the man in the family who abuses his wife or children. The head of the household, the very one charged with providing support and safety to the family, may actually be the one most likely to inspire anything but secure feelings. The home, instead of a haven from outside forces, becomes a prison of hopelessness and of demeaning, violent behavior.

It has been estimated that one to two million spouses are assaulted each year. They are pushed, punched, kicked, beaten, hit with fists, slapped, or attacked with a weapon. Some are killed. Nearly 20 percent of the murders in 1986 were committed within the family. One-third of all female homicide victims were killed by their mates.

Women are not just victimized only once. Abuse is seldom an isolated incident. The National Crime Survey showed that, during the period 1978-1982, once a woman was victimized by domestic violence, her risk of being victimized again was considerably increased, espe-

cially if the crime was not reported to the authorities. Approximately one-third of these women were victimized again within six months.

Even with these disturbing statistics, law enforcement officials consider spouse abuse to be the single most under-reported crime in the United States. So, all our facts and figures do not include those who refuse to report on what they see as a private, family "problem."

The problem does not end there. The effects of domestic violence make an economic impact as well. It is estimated that \$3 to \$5 billion a year is lost to business because of injuries from domestic violence. This figure does not even include other costs which result from this crime, such as for health care, emergency aid, and welfare.

Most Americans do not want to admit that family violence is a real and enormous problem. Somehow, our society seems to be able to focus on suicide, pornography, drugs, education deficiencies, and other issues as they relate to the family, but we seem to have a collective unwillingness to admit that violence within family life is a tragedy of our time. We tend to ignore the violence, or "condemn the victim," or choose sides, while allowing this terrible problem to evolve into a legacy of abuse. Only when we realize that violence touches our neighbors, our friends, and even our own families will we be committed to purging it from the homes in America. We must admit to ourselves that hiding the crime, or hiding FROM the crime, may be just as wrong as perpetrating it.

Tom Clifford of the *Newport News (Virginia) Daily Press/Times Herald* says, "People who live in domestic violence live in a tyranny of terror." Their plight is grievous because they believe they have no place to go where they can be safe, and no one to whom they can turn who will listen with an understanding heart. They

wear a mantle of guilt which has been placed on them by themselves and society.

Family violence is not just a political issue. It is a pro-family issue, a man's issue, a woman's issue, a church issue, a civic issue, and a criminal issue. Family violence is everybody's issue. We must all act in ways to intervene, prevent, support, and protect the victims. It is a human rights issue for which we all must take responsibility if we want to see our way of life, and the values that make America great, continue in generations to come.

Attorney General's Task Force

In September 1983, the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence was created to study family violence, to recommend better ways to intervene and end the violence, and preserve the family unit, if possible. It was supervised by Lois Haight Herrington, then Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice, whose concerns for the victims of crime and family violence are well-known. Hearings were held by the Task Force in six cities, and written and oral testimony was taken from more than 1,000 individuals including doctors, attorneys, nurses, prosecutors, judges, victims, abusers, ministers, victim service providers, and concerned citizens. A thorough effort was made to interview those directly involved with domestic violence, including victims themselves, to learn how we can better respond to this tragic national problem.

In September 1984, a report was published by the Task Force with 63 recommendations. This report came to the fundamental conclusion that "the nature of the abusive act, not just the relationship of the victim to the abuser, should guide the criminal justice system's response." (*Final Report, Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence*, p. 4) This report reiterated the fact that domestic violence is a crime.

Myths About Spouse Abuse

The Task Force Report challenged long-held false beliefs about family violence which have caused the crime to be largely ignored. Among these false beliefs are the following: (1) "Family violence is not a serious problem." On the contrary, FBI statistics and Task Force testimony reveal that it is a problem of major proportions. Family violence utilizes large amounts of law enforcement time and resources, contributes to adult criminal behavior, delinquent behavior in children and adolescents, suicide attempts and drug and alcohol abuse in women, and in the escalating rate of divorce.

(2) "Wife-beating is found only among the poor and uneducated." On the contrary, domestic violence is found everywhere, in every ethnic group, age group, and

economic group. A college degree doesn't keep one from smashing another's face. Serious abuse committed by doctors, teachers, lawyers, and other professionals was reported to the Attorney General's Task Force.

(3) "A battered wife must deserve such abuse, or she would leave." This is probably the most pitiful part of the ignorance surrounding domestic violence, yet many people believe this myth. If a street poll were conducted, "They must have asked for it" would be a likely response, and that would not be an exclusively male opinion. Surprisingly, there are women who believe this myth just as strongly as men. It comes from the idea that since wives nag, husbands are justified in violent behavior toward them; that striking out is a common and understandable reaction, and the man's prerogative.

This reasoning is outrageous. First, nothing short of a violent assault should provoke a violent response. No one *deserves* abuse. Second, the testimony before the Attorney General's Task Force revealed that the cause for violence — the trigger — is usually a minor incident and certainly not one designed to cause stress or justify a violent reaction.

(4) "A battered wife must enjoy the abuse, or she would leave." Some women can't afford to leave; it is a matter of economics. Where would she live? How would the bills be paid? Many battered women are kept isolated from family and friends and have no one to help them. Religious convictions are another reason why some women don't leave. Battered women want to stop the violence, not break up their homes. In the victim's mind, leaving is to admit abuse — and failure. Leaving forces the wife to abandon any pretense of wedded bliss and exposes the family to the embarrassment of public knowledge of abuse in the family. Most victims are ashamed to reveal the violence in their home and deny the severity of the problem. Fear of the unknown is too much for many battered women to handle, even when compared to the fear they have of their husbands.

There are many other myths, all of which can be counteracted, which often cloud our perspective. However, domestic violence cannot be wished away or reasoned away.

No problem can be solved until people are aware there *is* a problem, and understand it. "The nation's ability to cope with the problem of family violence depends on knowing much more about how it is caused and what may be done to break the cycle of violence." (*Final Report, Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence*, p. 6) Not just a few, but a big majority of Americans must be made aware of family violence so we can join together in a national commitment to keep peace at home.

Victims of family violence cannot be allowed to suffer in isolation from the community. Violence is violence, whether it is from a stranger or a family member, whether it is on the street corner or in the bedroom. We cannot afford the luxury of ignoring one of the major health problems in the United States.

Task Force on Families in Crisis

The Task Force on Families in Crisis (TFFC), a private organization, is concerned about family violence, and not only wants to do something to prevent it, but to intervene before violence causes injuries or death. Many members of the Task Force have worked at State Legislatures in behalf of domestic violence legislation that would aid victims and their children. All the Task Force members have worked for years as volunteers on issues supportive of women, men, children, and the family.

The Task Force started to function in 1984 with a Domestic Violence Media Project in connection with the network showing of the film "The Burning Bed." Members gave local interviews in various media centers, attempting to focus public attention on the need to identify and address the problem of family violence.

In 1984, Sandy McDade, Jayne Schindler, Dorothy English, Donna Muldrew and LaNeil Wright, all members of TFFC, testified before the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence. During these hearings, the panel heard over and over from people who believe there is an enormous void in reaching victims of family violence.

The Attorney General's Task Force report pointed out that violence is learned behavior. Many batterers were themselves abused as children. *All* participants in family violence, whether victim or perpetrator, are victims and suffer from the violence. They *all* need help, but they don't know where to go or what kind of help is available. Many of these people don't realize that family violence is a crime and is definitely *not* normal. Their basic system of values may prevent them from seeking guidance or services. The public is also a victim when society refuses to recognize violence for what it is, a crime.

As long as such conditions exist, every possible avenue must be explored to help victims, batterers, and those who do not know that violence is a criminal act.

Family Violence Prevention Project

In 1986, the Task Force on Families in Crisis was awarded a cooperative agreement with the Office for Victims of Crime within the U.S. Department of Justice for a three-pronged project to be completed by the summer of 1988. TFFC's goals are to articulate and implement selected recommendations of the Final Report of the Attorney General's Task Force. TFFC's emphasis

is to energize the private sector, including businesses, civic groups, churches and clubs, in order to prevent domestic violence and strengthen families.

As part of its Family Violence Prevention Project, TFFC works on three main projects: (1) to create public awareness of the growing problem of family violence, focusing on spouse abuse, (2) to establish Community Task Forces in five sites across the country as model demonstration projects, encouraging local citizens to develop and implement plans for preventing spouse abuse, and calling on the private sector to do its part in making the family a more stable unit, and (3) to publish a national directory of private services and programs (largely supported by individual or organizational contributions) which offer various options to help both victims and abusers.

1. Public Awareness Campaign

The TFFC national office has produced brochures, information cards, newsletters, and fliers for use by volunteers to educate the public. More comprehensive public-awareness tools will be a booklet on "Families Helping Families" and a video on spouse abuse, which will have supplemental materials included for distribution. The 30-minute video, produced by Upton Production in San Diego, California, is designed to call attention to the growing problem of domestic violence and highlight the methods of intervention and prevention espoused by TFFC. It is ideal for seminars, group discussion, forums, classes, and presentations. The video will be available in the summer of 1987.

2. Community Task Forces

The Task Force on Families in Crisis has selected five sites to develop an intensive community project to try to reduce domestic violence: Honolulu, Hawaii; Indianapolis, Indiana; Bossier City, Louisiana; Burlington area, Vermont; and Seattle, Washington. These sites are in various stages of planning, development and community-wide work. Each Community Task Force will assess the nature and frequency of spouse abuse locally, and then design plans tailored to the needs of the community. This includes plans for family strengthening activities, augmenting current family violence services, developing new ones, improving public awareness, working with local criminal justice agencies, and encouraging business, church and civic groups to support programs for victims and batterers, including housing, employment training and substance abuse treatment.

3. Directory of Private Services

A network of state chairmen is organizing local volunteers to contact private services to catalogue their particular efforts in the area of domestic violence. As

information is gathered, it is sent to the national office in Nashville, Tennessee. The directory will be compiled by the end of the Family Violence Prevention Project in mid-1988. More volunteers are always needed. For information on how you can help your local TFFC contact, write or call the national TFFC office.

Solutions for Family Violence

Among the solutions advocated by TFFC are batterers programs, family strengthening programs, and education. In order to prevent violence, we must deal with the source, which is the batterer. TFFC recommends a strong law enforcement approach, which forces the abuser into therapy. This may be the only way the overwhelming majority of batterers can be helped. This comes about through the coordinated effort of law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges.

Law enforcement officers must presume that arrest is the appropriate response to family violence. The prosecutor should file charges against the abuser and make it clear that the state — not the victim — is going forward with prosecution. The judges must treat the violence as a serious criminal offense by imposing the appropriate punishment. This can be jail time, admonitions or probation; and whatever the disposition of the case, court-ordered counseling is a necessity. The batterer must go into therapy. This coordinated effort can play a major role in ending violent behavior.

People must recognize that "violence in the home strikes at the heart of our society." Churches need to accept their role by teaching about it, helping to provide therapy, supporting the victim and her family, and encouraging older families to help younger families. TFFC is developing an effective program to help families where violence may have recently erupted but is not yet severe, or where the family is at risk for violence, and where the couple is willing to work to prevent further violence. This new program provides friendship, support and appropriate role models, instead of requiring those who provide assistance to impose rigid guidelines of prescribed behavior on troubled families. This program is not seen as a substitute for professional counseling when counseling is needed.

The generational cycle of violence, and the theory that violence is a learned behavior, indicate that acceptable behavior must be taught and the violent behavior unlearned. TFFC supports such methods as anger management seminars and counseling to handle stress. To break the generational cycle, however, we must reach the children. Schools need to emphasize that violence is *not* a socially-acceptable way of life.

The recent upsurge in teenage shootings in Detroit has prompted parents, students, and concerned citizens to develop ways to send the message of non-violence to

the youth of the city, and to ask for parents' pledges that their children will not leave home with a weapon. We applaud this effort as an example of parents and children joining with local schools to teach responsibility.

Similar efforts must be made in connection with family violence. A clear, concise and constant message of "no violence" must be the rule at home as well as school. We must teach our children the value of family life and the harmony of self-control as the goal.

The Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence made several recommendations to improve state legislation on domestic violence: stressing that states should enact laws to permit law enforcement officers to make warrantless arrests for misdemeanor offenses involving family violence; making the violation of a protection order issued in a family violence case a criminal offense; and permitting overnight incarceration of persons arrested for incidents of family violence in appropriate cases. TFFC supports these recommendations and will promote legislation designed to protect the victim and treat family violence as a crime, with the goal of ending the violence and preserving the family when that is possible.

The overriding concern of the Task Force on Families in Crisis is just what the name says. TFFC wants to work with families in crisis, and against those things which perpetuate violence in their lives. The TFFC wants to maintain the family as the cornerstone of our society.

I urge you to become involved in combatting family violence. Please write or call: Mrs. Tottie Ellis, Executive Director, Family Violence Prevention Project, Task Force on Families in Crisis, Post Office Box 120495, Nashville, TN 37212, phone 615/383-4575.

From the Report of the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence

"The best of all strategies for dealing with family violence is to prevent it from occurring in the first place."

"Because family violence is predominantly learned behavior and cyclical in nature, early intervention is critical in averting and preventing abuse."

"The family is the bedrock of civilization. America derives its strength, purpose and productivity from its commitment to strong family values. For our nation to thrive and grow, we must do all that we can to protect, support, and encourage America's families."

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