

Men's Health Network

Health Data Summary

July, 1994 (Updated June 2000)

FAMILY VIOLENCE ◇ FV-117-S

CONTACT: Men's Health Network : Washington, D.C.

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Domestic Violence: A Two-way Street

One man battered every 14 seconds!

Domestic violence is a confusing and disturbing phenomena, perhaps rooted in the frustrations and disappointments of a hectic society, but it is not gender specific as many would have us believe. In what has been called a "dance of mutual destructiveness"¹, mainstream research indicates that men and women abuse each other with almost equal frequency. For instance, the statistic that "one women is battered every 15 seconds" is based on research by Strass and Gelles which indicate assaults by husbands or boyfriends on 1.8 million women every year, but also found assaults by wives or girlfriends on 2 million men every year. "One man is battered every 14 seconds"? Yes, but who cares? "That study also found that 54% of all violence termed 'severe' was by women."² As cosponsors of the American Medical Association's Conference on Family Violence³, we noted a certain reluctance on the part of some of the participants to address the cycle of family violence. Until we as a society decide to deal with both sides of the issue, we can never hope to find an effective solution to the problem.

Since society does not define abuse of men by women as a problem, official police data reflects a much more frequent response to abuse of women by men than of men by women. Therefore, it is not surprising to find over 90% of the calls to police or to hotlines coming from women, not men.⁴ If a man called, who would listen?

Without treatment, the cycle continues.

Society's failure to address abuse by women has some rather tragic results:

- The cycle of family violence will not end until we are willing to treat not only men who initiate violent acts, but the women also. No adequate treatment programs for abusive women exist.
- The man, generally being larger than the woman, is more likely to inflict physical injury when he responds in kind to abuse from the woman, but the woman is more likely to overcome the size advantage by using a weapon.⁵
- Children are at particular risk. A 125 lb. woman is just as dangerous to a small child as is a 150 lb. man and the failure to admit that women can be violent has resulted in an increasingly tragic epidemic of child abuse.

¹ "Women Are Responsible Too", Judith Shervin, Ph.D. and Jim Sniechowski, Ph.D., Los Angeles Times. June 21, 1994.

² Research by Murray Strauss and Richard Gelles as reported in "Women Are Responsible Too", Judith Shervin, Ph.D. and Jim Sniechowski, Ph.D., Los Angeles Times. June 21, 1994.

³ March 11-13, 1994.

⁴ "Spouse Abuse: A Two-way Street", Warren Farrell, Ph.D., USA Today. June 29, 1994.

⁵ National Crime Survey, Census Bureau in "Spouse Abuse: A Two-way Street", Warren Farrell, Ph.D., USA Today. June 29, 1994.

Children, the tiniest victims.

Considering the failure of society to define violence by women as a problem, the child abuse data is particularly disturbing. Data from the states' protective service agencies indicate that children have much more to fear from their mothers than from their fathers, with mothers abusing their children at a rate approaching or exceeding twice that of fathers. In New Jersey, for instance, 70% of the confirmed parental child abuse is committed by mothers, not fathers, 66% in Alaska, 67% in Virginia, 68% in Texas, and 62% in Minnesota. One study of inner-city child abuse found 49% of the total child abuse being perpetrated by single parent mothers.⁶ It was at the National Conference on Family Violence that Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders so clearly defined the family violence problem as a cycle that will not be broken until abused women stop abusing their children.⁷

Child abuse by men and women appears to be more equally distributed when non-parents are included (aunts, uncles, baby sitters, strangers, step-parents, etc.). However, this may be because some of what we might ordinarily call abuse of children, particularly boys, is sanctioned by society. The use of "corporal punishment" against young students falls disproportionately on boys of elementary school age, a segment of the school population where women constitute the majority of teachers. Black boys are at special risk.

Schools are designed to be the learning centers of our society, teaching not only academics but behavior. One wonders what learning phenomena occurs when a boy is struck by a board wielded by a female teacher? Does he learn to pick up an object and hit someone if they do something he doesn't like?⁸ These same teachers seem to develop other means of disciplining the girls in their classes. That, too, might teach the boys an unintended lesson.

Intra-Lesbian Violence: Women in Danger.

Studies of intra-lesbian violence provide further evidence of the potential for female initiated violence. A surprising 54% of lesbians report having been physically abusive in their current relationship while 14% of gay men report abuse in their current relationship. Contrast this with 3% of women who report that they have suffered abuse from their current heterosexual partner and 11% of heterosexual men and women who report ever being involved in an abusive relationship at any time, either at present or in the past.^{9,10,11}

Defining domestic violence as the attempt of men to control women makes it difficult to develop legal procedures and treatment methods designed to treat intra-lesbian violence.¹² Programs should be designed to provide treatment for all perpetrators of domestic violence, not just those that happen to be male. Failing to do so is unfair to both the male and female victims of domestic violence initiated by women.

Finding solutions.

The solution is rather simple -- we must reevaluate how we address violence in our society, even how we define it. And, we must learn to be effective parents, spouses, and teachers without resorting to violence to resolve disputes with our loved ones and with those we are educating. Most importantly, we as a society must begin to acknowledge that women are no less than equal partners in the cycle of violence.

⁶ A study of child abuse in Lansing, Michigan. Joan Ditson and Sharon Shay in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Volume 8. 1984.

⁷ Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, MD, MPH to National Conference on Family Violence. March 13, 1994.

⁸ "The Roots of Male Violence", Perry Treadwell, *Atlanta Journal / Atlanta Constitution*. February 8, 1994.

⁹ "Violence in Gay and Lesbian Relationships ...", Lori Dawson, Caroline Waterman, Michael Bologna, SUNY.

¹⁰ "Is it a war against women?", John Leo, *U.S. News and World Report*. July 11, 1994.

¹¹ "Spouse Abuse: A Two-way Street", Warren Farrell, Ph.D., *USA Today*. June 29, 1994.

¹² "Lavender Bruises: Intra-Lesbian Violence, Law, and Lesbian Legal Theory", Ruthann Robson, *Golden State University Law Review*, Vol. 20. 1990.

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July 10, 1994 (updated June 2000)

FAMILY VIOLENCE <> FV 118

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Justice Report Reflects Dual Nature of Spousal Homicide **Mothers Most Likely to Murder Their Children**

A report issued today by the Department of Justice indicates that men and women are equally capable of committing spousal homicide.¹ The study consists of a sampling from the 75 largest counties representing over 1/2 of the murders in the country, and excludes cases where no charges were filed because of credible claims of self defense or other excuse. The murders were committed in 1988 or earlier and at least one murder defendant in the case was disposed by the court in 1988. Not included are cases of negligent manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, or attempted murder.²

If a parent murdered his or her child:

- the murderer was most often the mother (55%) rather than the father (45%) (pg. 1)
- 78% of the child victims were 11 years of age or younger (pg. 6)
- mothers killed sons (64%) more often than they killed daughters (36%) (pp. 1, 4)
- fathers killed sons (48%) and daughters (52%) with approximately equal frequency (pp. 1, 4)
- the murder was preceded by child abuse in 79% of the cases (pg. 5)

When only those persons charged with murder are counted, data reveals that:³

- 41% of the murderers were women who killed their husbands (pg. 1)
- 59% were men who killed their wives (pg. 1)
- 56% of defendants had a prior criminal record (pg. 1)

Among black families:

- 53% of the killers were men who killed their wives (pg. 1)
- 47% were women who killed their husbands (pg. 1)

Implications for prevention:

- Children living in abusive families should be monitored more closely with priority given to those children whose parents have a criminal record.
- Society must recognize that women are equal partners in the cycle of family violence.
- Courts must begin to order treatment for women who commit an act of family violence.
- Parents must be taught methods to discipline young children without resorting to violence.
- Mothers must learn disciplinary techniques which recognize that boys are as fragile as girls.

¹ NCJ-143498. Murder in Families.

² Some infant and young child deaths might usually be included in this group, but are omitted from NCJ-143498.

³ It is unclear whether the data reflect women who hire or entice someone to kill their spouse, a rather common phenomena. If the data do not, then including those women would give a ratio nearer 50-50.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Join With Us to End the Vicious Cycle of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse

One man battered every 14 seconds!

Domestic violence is a confusing and disturbing phenomena, but it is not gender specific as many would have us believe. In what has been called a “dance of mutual destructiveness”¹, mainstream research indicates that men and women abuse each other with almost equal frequency. The same study which found that a woman is abused by her spouse every 15 seconds, also found that a man is abused by his spouse every *14 seconds*.²

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month but cannot hope to end domestic violence until we understand the cycle of violence. Children who see their fathers or mothers abused are more likely to become abusers as adults; children who are abused by a parent are at greater risk of becoming abusers as adults; and more children are abused by their mothers than by their fathers.

The Problem!

- Wives or girlfriends assault *2 million* men every year (1.8 million women are assaulted by their spouses)
- 54% of all domestic violence termed ‘severe’ is committed by women against their husbands or boyfriends.³
- Over 2/3 of the child abuse committed by a parent is committed by the mother!⁴
- Mothers (55%) are more likely the fathers (45%) to murder their children,⁵
- Mothers kill sons (64%) more often than daughters (36%) and 78% of the child victims are under age 11.⁶
- One study of inner city child abuse found that 49% of all child abuse is committed by single parent mothers.⁷

If a man asked for help, who would listen?

Since society does not define abuse of men by women as a problem, official police data reflects a much more frequent response to abuse of women by men than of men by women. Therefore, it is not surprising to find over 90% of the calls to police or to hotlines coming from women, not men.⁸ If a man called, who would listen?

Finding solutions.

The solution is simple -- we must learn to be effective parents and spouses without resorting to violence to resolve disputes with our loved ones.

Most importantly, we as a society must begin to acknowledge that women are no less than equal partners in the cycle of violence. Until we develop programs to treat violent women, we not never hope to end the vicious cycle of domestic violence, nor can we hope to end the terrible tragedy of child abuse.

We ask that you join with us to end the vicious cycle of violence that afflicts our families and our society.

For more information about domestic violence, contact:

Men’s Health Network : www.menshealthnetwork.org : DV@menshealthnetwork.org : Washington, D.C. (6-2000)

¹ “Women Are Responsible Too”, Judith Shervin, Ph.D. and Jim Sniechowski, Ph.D., Los Angeles Times. June 21, 1994.

² Research by M. Strauss & R. Gelles as reported in “Women Are Responsible Too”, Judith Shervin, Ph.D. & Jim Sniechowski, Ph.D., Los Angeles Times. June 21, 1994.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Data provided by the Child Protective Service agencies of Virginia (67% mothers, 33% fathers), New Jersey (70% mothers, 30% fathers), Texas (68% mothers, 32% fathers), and Minnesota (62% mothers, 38% fathers), and Alaska (67% mothers, 33% fathers).

⁵ Bureau of Justice, “Murder in Families”, NCIJ-143498.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A study of child abuse in Lansing, Michigan. Joan Ditson and Sharon Shay in Child Abuse and Neglect, Volume 8. 1984.

⁸ “Spouse Abuse: A Two-way Street”, Warren Farrell, Ph.D., USA Today. June 29, 1994.