

**No.2**  
**Domestic Violence**

**Jane Mugford**  
 Project Manager, Australian Institute of Criminology

Domestic violence is an issue which many Australians would prefer not to think or talk about. Some would even argue that domestic violence is essentially a private matter of no concern to others—least of all to governments. However, there is a massive social and economic cost to the community produced by such violence. Every year thousands of our citizens, and women and children in particular, suffer physically, psychologically, and financially within their homes as a result of acts of violence against them. Millions of dollars are spent annually on police and court services, health and welfare services, women's refuges and social security benefits as a direct consequence of this violence. These are certainly matters of public concern.

This report, the second in the series Violence Today produced by the National Committee on Violence and published by the Australian Institute of Criminology, examines domestic violence in the context of contemporary Australian society. It is a report which has been prepared in close consultation with the National Women's Consultative Committee, and the Commonwealth/State Co-ordinating Task Force on Domestic Violence. It is also a report which is being published for National Domestic Violence Awareness Month—a period during which particular attention will be focused on what we can do as a nation to reduce this deeply troubling and pervasive form of violence afflicting our society.

Duncan Chappell  
 Chair National Committee on Violence

**'Too Many' by Sarah**  
*Too many 'IFS'*  
*Too many 'WHENS'*  
*Too many 'SORRYS'*  
*and 'NEVER AGAIN'S'*  
*Too many PROMISES*  
*Too many LIES*  
*Far too many 'ONE MORE TRIES'*  
*How many were there,*  
*Before I knew*  
*That 'ACTIONS' speak louder*  
*than 'PROMISES' do?*

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All societies have public mythologies to which the majority of their members play at least lip service. In our society, one myth concerns 'families' and 'homes'. In this myth the family together in its home is a warm, supportive unit, a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch 1977). Of course this myth is not completely false. Love, support and companionship are features of families and homes to a greater or lesser extent.

But the family has a multi-faceted nature. It is an agency of social control as well as an agency of social support, and has negative as well as positive features. The smaller the organisation, the more intense the relationships within it; and the nuclear family is one of the smallest organisations, with relationships that can be both positive, and very negative.

A second myth in our society concerns the inalienable nature of 'privacy'. Although the notion of privacy was absent or radically different in other times and places,

people today tend to feel that what happens within the family home is on-one else's business. We may tell close friends, family or neighbours about some problems, but other issues are considered very private indeed, and we probably tell no-one. Domestic violence, or spouse abuse, has tended to be one of these very private issues.

The irony is that 'private' matters may result in massive social and economic costs to the community. In recent years domestic violence has become a concern of governments and government agencies, and a topic of public awareness and discussion. Australian governments have implemented new legislation to assist victims, women's refuges have been established, and pressure groups have begun to put the issue on the public agenda.

In 1985 the Australian Institute of Criminology hosted a National Conference on Domestic Violence (see Hatty 1986), formulating many recommendations to relevant Government departments. During 1986, extensive consultations with women under the National Agenda for Women revealed that domestic violence was of major concern. The Federal Government responded in 1987 with a three-year \$1.6 m National Education Campaign.

**THE NATURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Office of the Status of Women in the Department of The Prime Minister and Cabinet commissioned research to guide the development of the National Education Campaign. Previous Australian research had

examined the experiences of victims, with limited research on the attitudes of professional groups, especially police. However, little was known here or overseas about the knowledge and attitudes of the general community. Given the apparent enormity of the public education task facing the Campaign organisers, it seemed vital to fill this information gap so that Campaign programs could be targeted appropriately. Two studies were developed following a review of the literature in the area (Easteal 1988). The first study, a survey of general community attitudes towards domestic violence, was conducted by the Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC) in late 1987. This was followed by an in-depth study by Elliott & Shanahan Research (ESR) of community attitudes (including rural, Aboriginal and non-English speaking groups), and also of attitudes of professionals working in the area, victims and perpetrators.

To determine what the public believed about domestic violence, the PPRC survey of community attitudes used a checklist of possible behaviours which might constitute domestic violence. Almost all respondents said that physical acts such as pushing, shoving, kicking and choking should be classified as domestic violence. A smaller but nonetheless substantial majority thought that smashing an object near one's wife (86 per cent) or threatening to hit (83 per cent) should be classified as domestic violence. However a clear distinction was evident between physical and other forms of behaviour. Only one-quarter of respondents classed denial of money and under half (48 per cent) verbal abuse as forms of domestic violence. One in four (26 per cent) did not consider that a man frightening his wife could be classified as violence.

The second study (ESR 1988) sought the views of victims and of professionals working with victims on what they considered domestic violence to be. The violence generally mentioned first by these groups was physical-bashing, hitting, punching, kicking, using a knife or a gun. These groups, however, went on to talk about other less obvious but equally damaging forms of violence, which the ESR report categorises as follows:

**Psychological, emotional or verbal abuse** involving threats, harassment and denigrating the spouse's

capacity as a housewife, mother and person. Insults often refer to body image ('you're fat'), sexual attractiveness ('slut') and capacity to cope ('you couldn't survive without me'). This abuse is not obviously visible or easily measured, yet can be devastating. Wives who once felt attractive, competent women can soon feel ugly and incompetent. Many endure such abuse for decades. They come to believe what is said; they become certain of their own incapacity to cope; and feel guilty about this state of affairs.

**Social abuse** involving social isolation derived from geographical isolation (perhaps living on a property miles from anywhere), from the husband's withdrawn behaviour or from forbidding his wife contacts. Samyia-Coorey (1987) describes the added burdens for victims in rural areas, who do not have access to services or to friends and neighbours who might help, where transport is expensive, where communities are small and word gets around, and where there is disproportionate ownership of guns (and a disproportionately high homicide rate using guns: Wallace 1986).

**Economic abuse** involving control by the husband or male partner of financial resources. Money may be denied and the wife may herself forego clothes or even food in order to 'manage'. She may be denied access to bank accounts or to a car in order that 'she can't squander money'.

**Sexual abuse** involving non-consensual sexual intercourse or other acts, perhaps including threats or use of a weapon. Women endure this, perhaps believing that it is their duty to meet such demands, or fearing that their spouse will go elsewhere for 'satisfaction'.

In most physically violent relationships these forms of abuse are also present, though they may also exist without the presence of physical abuse.

The results of these two research studies suggest a clear distinction between the understanding of those who have experienced domestic violence or work with victims, and the community in general. Those who are well acquainted with the behaviour have no doubt that non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical acts, whereas those in the general community are inclined to place less

emphasis on non-physical behaviours.

Men are the main perpetrators of domestic violence. Between 85 and 95 per cent of calls to police concern male assaults on female partners (Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force 1988), and in the PPRC survey nine out of ten respondents considered men to be the main perpetrators of domestic violence.

However, highly controversial findings from a United States national study of family violence (Straus & Gelles 1986) conducted in 1975 and repeated in 1985 suggested that within the family women are about as violent as men. The controversy arises because it is feared that the research results may be used to justify violence by men. Nonetheless, these two studies and the similar results of ten other studies cited by the authors indicate that this aspect of violence within the home cannot be ignored. More research is needed on the dynamics of violence within spousal and other family relationships.

While affirming the validity of their results, Straus and Gelles recognised that they can easily be misunderstood. Violence by men against women generally involves greater strength, aggression and ultimate impact. Furthermore, wife-to-husband violence is often committed in retaliation or self-defence. Murders committed by wives are usually desperate, last-ditch responses after receiving years of brutal violence.

The abusive relationship is said to have a 'Cycle of Violence', which some professionals working in the area have suggested is best used as a model of the man's experience. A build-up phase is self-generating in the male, regardless of the response of his partner. This is followed by a violent explosion by the male, and his subsequent remorse and attempts to justify the behaviour and assuage his guilt. Pursuit of the female partner includes displays of helplessness, threats of suicide and escalated violence. For a while there may be a 'honeymoon' phase, when the violence is dormant and relations between the couple are apparently good. However, the cycle is one of dependency by the male, and the 'phases' often become short-circuited with the passage of incidents, so that violence can occur without lead-up and without subsequent remorse.

The causes of domestic violence appear to be complex, operating at one or more levels. Theoretical

explanations deal with the phenomenon in different ways. For example, psychological theories relate to the individual male, sociological theories relate to structural conditions such as demographic characteristics and relationships within the family, socio-cultural theories emphasise traits and traditions of different peoples, and feminist theories address power and gender relationships within patriarchal societies. All theories have their strengths and weaknesses, and ideally we might aim for an integrated theoretical model.

At an empirical or observational level there are other characteristics that appear to accompany or precede domestic violence. In the ESR study, respondents drawn from the general community were asked for their views on the 'causes' of domestic violence. Responses included social pressures such as unemployment, financial stress, gambling and alcohol; relationship pressures such as sexist attitudes, jealousy and unrealistic marriage expectations; and individual pressures such as low self-esteem, inability to control anger and inability to express feelings.

Whatever the level of analysis, what emerges is distressing evidence that domestic violence is neither a haphazard nor a deviant activity, but one which is supported if not positively sanctioned throughout our culture.

## THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is difficult to estimate the extent of domestic violence because of a lack of suitable data. No prevalence studies have been conducted in Australia, phone-in surveys are limited by the self-report status of the respondents, and statistics collected by agencies such as police, refuges and crisis care services are fragmented. Furthermore, such agency statistics refer only to those persons who come to the attention of the agencies. We know that middle-class victims are less likely to report violence or enter refuges. We also know that many cases are never reported to any agency. A recent phone-in survey conducted in 1988 for the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force revealed that 12 per cent of respondents had never

spoken to anyone about the violence, and only 56 per cent had contact with police, in spite of the fact that they may have sustained serious injuries.

There are nonetheless broad estimates of the extent of domestic violence, suggesting that the behaviour is widespread, almost to the point of being a normal, expected behaviour pattern in many homes. Between one in three and one in ten families may be affected. In the USA Straus et al. (1980) concluded that one-third of all couples would be involved in a domestic violence incident at some time during their relationship, and that one in eight couples have the potential to be involved in a serious incident. In Canada, MacLeod (1980) estimated that one in ten married women is abused each year.

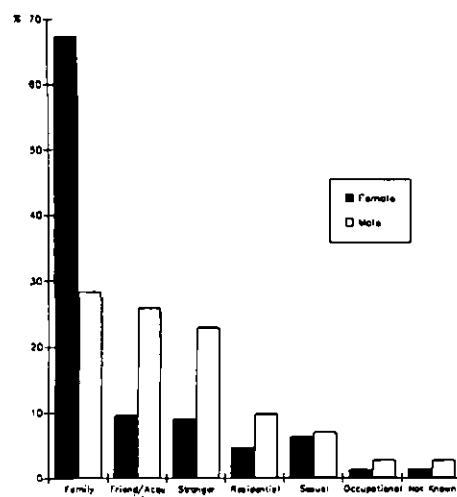
These figures refer, as with similar studies, to physically violent behaviour, because it is relatively easy to measure. If measures of psychological and sexual abuse were available, it would become evident that overall levels of abuse would be much higher than those revealed by Straus and Gelles.

Even though prevalence data are limited, there are other indicators that domestic violence is a major problem. For example, in 1986-1987 25 per cent of all offences against the person reported to police in NSW occurred in a private dwelling (NSW Police Department Annual Report). Furthermore, 43 per cent of homicides between 1968 and 1981 in NSW were within the family (Wallace 1986); 23 per cent of these occurred between spouses, and there was previous evidence of domestic violence in about half of these killings. Almost half (47 per cent) of all female victims were killed by their spouse compared with 10 per cent of male victims. These figures are remarkably similar to Canada and the United Kingdom.

The PPRC survey found that 46 per cent of respondents reported knowing someone involved in domestic violence. Though this figure is not a reliable indicator of the prevalence of domestic violence, it shows that the phenomenon is commonplace throughout the country.

Again, while firm statistics are not available, it is known that domestic violence occurs in all groups in the community, whether middle class or working class, old or young, black or white, English or non-English speaking background, whatever the occupation, and whether they reside

FIGURE 1 Relationship of Victim to Offender by Sex of Victim for Homicides in New South Wales 1968-81.



Source: Wallace, A. 1986, *Homicide: The Social Reality*, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

in urban or rural areas. What is not known is whether violence is distributed equally between such groups. Straus et al. (1980), however, identified several social factors which affect the rate of violence. Poor, unemployed, or part-time employed men in this study more often lived in violent households than men whose families were 'well-to-do'. At the same time, the study found that the uneducated were not the most violent.

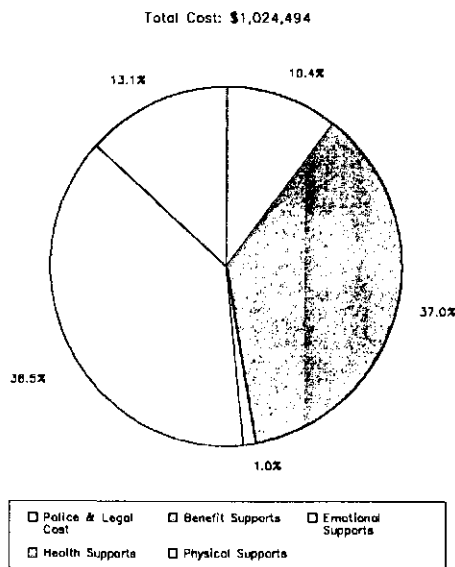
## THE COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are devastating consequences of violence to individuals and their families in terms of their physical and psychological health. Given that the propensity to commit violence within the home appears to be passed on from generation to generation, the problems are compounded.

The implications for health, welfare and criminal justice provision are staggering. In 1986-1987 refuge funding in Australia cost \$27.6m, and this is the tip of the iceberg. One must add to this figure the direct costs of policing, hospital and other medical services, court services and legal consultations, marriage guidance and other types of counselling, social security payments, housing provision and so on.

For the first time in Australia a study has costed domestic violence

FIGURE 2 Costs of Services Generated by 20 Victims of Domestic Violence.



Source: Roberts, G. 1988, 'Domestic Violence: costing of service provision for female victims—20 case histories' in *Beyond these Walls*, Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force.

in dollar terms (Roberts 1988). Data were derived from case histories of twenty women who were victims of domestic violence, taking into account the costs of services generated, other direct costs of compensation and superannuation payouts, and indirect costs relating to potential income lost. The costs incurred were well over \$1m for these twenty victims alone.

## COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

The PPRC survey found that only 1 per cent of respondents spontaneously mentioned domestic violence as an important issue affecting Australian families. However, when asked 'how serious a problem do you think domestic violence is in Australia today', 43 per cent considered it 'very serious'. A much higher proportion of women than men (50 per cent to 36 per cent) responded in this manner. When the response categories of 'very serious' and 'fairly serious' were combined, 85 per cent of the national sample were in this category.

These results indicate that while most of the community knows when prompted that domestic violence is an important issue, and many are undoubtedly concerned about the problem, it is not a top of mind issue. Most survey respondents mentioned unemployment and drugs as

being the most important issues affecting Australian families.

The same survey found that one-third of respondents felt that 'domestic violence is a private matter that should be handled within the family', over a quarter (28 per cent) felt that they would ignore the situation if they found out that a neighbour was beating his wife, two-thirds held the view that a woman who is beaten can always leave, and those with sexist attitudes were more likely to hold pro-violence attitudes and to consider that violent actions by a man against his wife are justifiable.

It should be noted that the PPRC survey was designed to assess community attitudes, not community behaviour. As with other social behaviour patterns, there is a difference between what people actually do, what they say they would do, what they think, and what they might say they would think in a public survey context. So, for example, while only a quarter of the survey respondents were prepared to say that they would ignore a situation in which their neighbour was known to be beating his wife, in reality the majority of people would ignore such a situation. Australians hold firm ideas about the privacy of family life and the importance of not 'dobbing in' others, which unfortunately are at odds with preventing domestic violence.

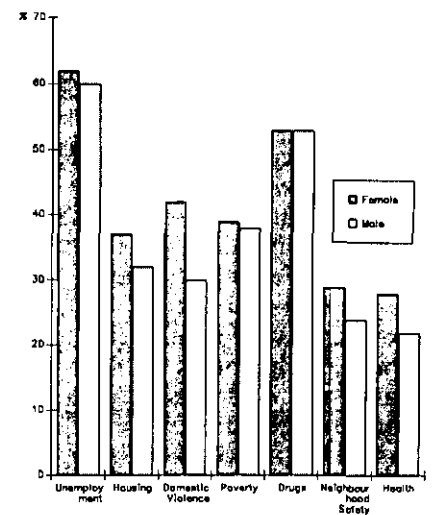
Remarkably, the survey revealed that large sections of the Australian public believe that violence against one's wife can be justified under some circumstances. Overall, 19 per cent of respondents, or nearly one in five, believed that it is acceptable for a man to use physical force against his wife under at least one circumstance. Although men were more likely than women to think that the use of physical force is acceptable (22 per cent to 17 per

TABLE 1 Circumstances in which physical force against wife considered acceptable

Circumstances	% Agreeing
Argues With or Refuses to Obey Him	2
Wastes Money	2
Doesn't Keep the House Clean	2
Doesn't Have Meals Ready on Time	1
Keeps Nagging Him	4
Refuses to Sleep with Him	3
Admits to Sleeping with Another Man	11
One or More of Above Circumstances	14
At Least One Circumstance	19

Source: Public Policy Research Centre Domestic Violence Attitude Survey (1988).

FIGURE 3 Issues affecting Families.



Source: Public Policy Research Centre 1988, *Domestic Violence Attitude Survey*, conducted for the Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

cent), the difference is not as marked as one might expect.

In terms of the types of actions considered justifiable under some circumstances, it is again remarkable that 82 per cent of the sample sanctioned 'denying money', 58 per cent considered 'yelling abuse' acceptable, 22 per cent agreed that 'smashing a household object' is justifiable, and as many as 10 per cent felt that 'pushing or shoving' would be alright under some circumstances.

The survey also found that persons from blue-collar households were more likely than those from white-collar households to believe that physical force could be acceptable. Again, what we do not know is the relationship between expressed attitude and behaviour patterns, though we do know that domestic violence occurs in both white-collar and blue-collar households.

## THE VICTIMS

The experiences and responses of victims have been the focus of a number of phone-in surveys in Australia, some of which have been conducted specifically for state task forces on domestic violence. The most recent task force, in Queensland, held a phone-in which ran for four days in April 1988. Ten telephone lines were employed for the purpose and rarely during the period were any of those lines free. Phone calls were received for weeks afterwards.

Out of 661 questionnaires analysed in this survey, 94 per cent

**TABLE 2 Any circumstance in which physical force against wife acceptable—per cent agreeing**

Females n=860	Malés n=634	City n=849	Country n=655	White-Collar n=849	Blue-Collar n=565
17	22	19	20	15	25

Source: Public Policy Research Centre Domestic Violence Attitude Survey (1988).

were from women. For 65 per cent of respondents the violence began at under 35 years of age. In the majority of cases (68 per cent) the violence commenced during marriage, but for quite a large proportion (19 per cent) it started while the couple were living together but not married, and for 13 per cent it started before the couple were living together. Almost half of the victims (45 per cent) endured the violence for between three and ten years, and 14 per cent suffered for more than twenty years. The majority of victims responded passively to the violence or tried to escape, with only 24 per cent describing themselves as fighting back; 54 per cent described the abuse as resulting in permanent damage to their health.

Despite the predominating community attitude that if a woman does not like it she can always leave, women experience enormous difficulties in leaving a violent relationship. Most in fact do not leave. Concern for their children is paramount, followed by practical considerations such as having no money, no transport, no housing, no social support, and so on. In addition there are victims who stay because they are (realistically) afraid of their partner, and there are those who say that they stay because they still love their partner and always hope (usually unrealistically) that he will change. The evidence indicates that partners do not change without a crisis (for example, arrest) and/or long-term intervention programs.

As a result of their experiences, victims are usually under-confident, lacking in self-esteem, and dependent on their partners. They feel guilty and responsible for the violence. Yet at the same time most women have an inner strength which often they do not recognise. They become survivors, anticipating violence and employing avoidance mechanisms. Even so their efforts are often in vain. As the ESR research reported, 'One common scenario was for wives to affect a busy manner at the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes, believing that this could in no way invoke a violent reaction from their husbands on

their return to their home. Almost all the victims reported that this had been futile; they had been attacked from behind innumerable times and now experience ongoing anxiety when at the sink with their backs turned.'

For most victims, calling the police or leaving the violent partner are desperate measures, to be taken only where the violence is so severe that their lives or the lives of their children are in danger.

The community at large (often including the professionals in helping agencies) do not understand or sympathise with victims. For example, women who are not victims often feel that women who are should leave violent situations, and they cannot understand why victims continue to 'put up with it'. Men tend to be more sympathetic towards victims than do other women, though this is more because of a felt need to give women chivalrous protection than it is because of a realistic understanding of the victim's circumstances.

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal women also experience violence within the family home, in their case exacerbated by language difficulties, lack of appropriate services, lack of knowledge of services, religious and other cultural constraints, and prejudice and a lack of understanding on the part of those providing support services.

## THE PERPETRATORS

If we lack some knowledge of victims, the situation with regard to perpetrators is very much worse. They are still the great unknown in this area, though some limited Australian data were made available through the ESR research, and overseas research is increasing.

Based on interviews with perpetrators and with professionals working with domestic violence cases, the ESR study concluded that perpetrators exhibit poor self-esteem, poor communication

skills, immaturity, insecurity, an incapacity to differentiate emotions, an unwillingness to acknowledge emotions, and excessive dependence upon their wives.

It also appears that prior exposure to abuse is a strong predictor of the severity and prevalence of subsequent violence. However a direct causal link is not supported by the available research; there are many who experienced violence as a child but choose not to become violent as an adult (Edleson et al. 1985).

To those outside the family, perpetrators are often seen as presentable, affable and responsible people. In line with their understanding of what it means to be a man and a partner, perpetrators expect strength, dependability and control of themselves. In reality, perpetrators tend to be none of these things and they attempt to control others in the only place where they have the full confidence to do so—in the family home—and in the only way that they can rely on—through superior physical strength.

Ironically, perpetrators usually recognise as a general principle that violence is 'wrong', though they tend to justify it to themselves when they practise it in their own home. Sometimes perpetrators say that their behaviour is 'out of control' and sometimes they feel they 'have control' (Stets 1988). However, they tend to rationalise their violent actions as either justifiable, or out of their control. Denial of responsibility for the violence they have perpetrated is vehement. The wife is blamed, or a hard day at work, or alcohol, or the fact that their father was the same. In reality, such reasoning is diversionary, and cannot be treated as causal. Alcohol, for example, is often co-present with abuse in the home, but it is usually but one symptom of the same problems which result in the abuse itself.

Separation is devastating for violent men, who respond with helplessness, manipulative pursuit techniques, and sometimes suicide threats. Perpetrators rarely seek help, even in crisis. When they do attend self-help or counselling sessions, the immediate goal is getting their wives back, not finding out how they can address their own problem.

As noted, more research on perpetrators is needed. With respect to the foregoing results, for example, it is not known whether

the characteristics identified (low self-esteem etc.) are associated with being a perpetrator per se or with being a perpetrator who has been identified. This point can be compared with other criminological research which has shown that the characteristics of offenders incarcerated for a particular activity are associated more with incarceration than with the activity itself.

## LEGISLATING AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The first of recent Australian legal reforms designed to assist the management of domestic violence cases was introduced in NSW in 1983. Since that time, all Australian states except Queensland have introduced similar legislation, and new legislation is presently under consideration by the NT. Queensland has recently completed (October 1988) a task force inquiry which, in line with other state and territory task force inquiries over the last six years, recommended that separate legislation be introduced 'to provide for the protection of victims of domestic violence from continued violent or abusive behaviour by a spouse.'

The main thrust of the new legislation is similar in the different states, and is broadly modelled on legislation introduced in the USA, the UK and Canada. Features include: definitions of the range of offences which constitute domestic violence; the availability of a protection order from a court where there is actual violence or a reasonable fear of violence, whether the spouse is lawful or de facto, and whether or not the couple is cohabiting; making the onus of proof on the civil standard of 'balance of probabilities'; extension of the protection order to cover others in the same household, particularly children; encouraging the laying of charges by police, rather than placing the full onus of responsibility for informing onto the victim; provision for the compellability of spouses as witnesses; extension of police powers of entry to a dwelling where a domestic violence offence is suspected to have occurred; and making a breach of a protection order a criminal offence and automatic grounds for arrest.

## POLICING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As has always been the case, legislation can only be as good as its enforcement. While there has always been legislation which could be used for cases of domestic violence, it was vastly underused for this purpose. The new legislation was designed not only to give greater support to victims but also to alert enforcement agencies to the seriousness of the offence. It was hoped that assault within the home would henceforth be treated on a par with assault by a stranger in the street. Accordingly, directives were given to police officers who were to enforce the new laws and new training segments introduced in police academies.

Police are at the forefront of domestic violence issues. In addition to being immediately responsible for enforcing legislation, they are often the only source of round-the-clock assistance to victims. Many homicides are the end point of domestic abuse, as are a high percentage of serious assaults, and police calls are often required to the same household time and time again. Police are well aware of the large proportions of time and resources that are committed to domestic incidents. In a 1980-1981 survey the NSW Police Force identified domestic violence as being second only to traffic incidents in terms of police workload.

Despite the effort, there remains widespread dissatisfaction by victims and by domestic violence workers with the effectiveness of policing domestic violence. Police remain reluctant to become involved with what they continue to see as a private family matter, and are slow to take up their power to themselves arrest offenders. For example, in the seven months following new legislation in Victoria becoming operational, only thirty-two protection orders out of a total of 1476 were initiated by police (Domestic Violence Working Group 1988). NSW data are more optimistic. In 1986 only 5.4 per cent of protection orders were initiated by police, compared with 18.9 per cent of a larger number of orders (1426 compared with 968) in 1987 (Personal communication, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research). These figures

demonstrate the importance of continued training of police officers to deal with domestic violence cases.

Nonetheless there remains insufficient understanding by police of the needs of victims, and there is evidence that the police retain ambivalent attitudes towards violence in the home, tending to treat domestic assaults as qualitatively different from other kinds of assault ('it's just a domestic').

However, the difficulties inherent in police work are also not always understood. Policing domestic violence remains a complex task which is surrounded by ambiguity about what is considered good, appropriate or effective policing (Corns 1988). The main ambiguity is that a large proportion of police work does not involve law enforcement directly, and there has always been debate about whether the police function primarily as 'crime fighters' or social welfare agents (in the case of domestic violence, they have traditionally emphasised the latter). The police are also concerned about how to provide protection for victims without infringing the rights and civil liberties of offenders, and despite new standing orders there remain dilemmas about how to treat particular cases.

A research experiment in the USA has helped to guide police with the vexed question of whether or not to arrest offenders (Sherman & Berk 1984). Looking at the effect on recidivism of three standard police responses to domestic incidents—counselling both parties; sending the assailants away from home for several hours; and arrest—arrest was found to be the most effective method of reducing subsequent incidents of violence, suggesting tentatively that a policy of arrest should be adopted. An assessment of the introduction of mandatory arrest for domestic violence cases in Washington State (Ferguson 1987) supports such a position. A large-scale replication of the Sherman and Berk experiment is presently under way at the National Institute of Justice in the USA, and the police in Australia will await the results with interest.

Danger to police is a major concern in the setting of police standing orders on domestic incidents; 'domestics' have long been considered one of the most potentially dangerous. A recent study in the USA has shed new

light on this topic (Garner & Clemmer 1986), showing that while there is undoubted risk for police at domestic incidents, other types of incident (robbery in particular) are more dangerous.

## RESPONSE OF OTHER AGENCIES

**W**hile police response to domestic violence legislation is critical, it is by no means the only agency whose assistance is required. In the courts, for example, judges play a critical role in responding to cases of domestic violence, as well as shaping community response (Goolkasian 1986). Yet for the most part this key group has been overlooked, and their attitudes are often more extreme than those held by the police (Stannard 1987 quoting Hatty 1986).

The ESR research shows that there are severe gaps in knowledge of domestic violence issues by professionals in a range of services including health, welfare and legal and court services. Such service providers tend also to display a lack of sympathy towards victims, often to the extent of blaming the victim either directly or tacitly. In the absence of appropriate training with respect to domestic violence, practitioners assume the broader community values and tend to interpret violence as the result of the woman's failure to meet domestic demands or maintain family stability. Their responses are 'overwhelmingly negative, at best ambivalent or detached' (Easteal 1988).

A marriage guidance counsellor (Macdonald 1987) said of his profession '... it seems remarkable that until relatively recently so little was written in the professional literature about violence in marriage. This is not because violence and abuse was not happening, rather it was because marriage counsellors themselves, along with other professional helpers, were caught up in the complex pattern of denial which surrounds the issue. We were not asking the right questions, nor picking up the classic signs.'

As a result of such attitudes and knowledge levels, police remain reluctant to arrest perpetrators; medical practitioners appear to be equally unsupportive, often

ignoring the abuse and treating the client symptomatically; lawyers and the judicial system appear indifferent and inactive; clergy are felt by victims to be the least helpful of all agencies; and ambivalence and detachment are found in other health and welfare workers.

The only support agencies with a consistently positive image are women's refuges. Victims feel that refuges are psychologically supportive, non-blaming, provide the practical help they need to survive, and help with overcoming feelings of worthlessness and guilt.

The only negative findings about shelters relate not to the workers but to the difficulties for some groups in using refuges at all (Easteal 1988). Women of non-English speaking background often feel even more than other Australian women that they dare not talk about the violence they receive. For them, admitting to violence and perhaps leaving the family home is seen as a discredit to their family. Both ethnic and Aboriginal groups have indicated the need for a greater understanding of cultural issues. Middle-class women also find it difficult to use refuges, because they feel they have a lot to lose by leaving home and also do not conceptualise themselves as 'needing' help in this way.

## EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

**F**or many in the community, domestic violence is justifiable under some circumstances. Both men and women accept that violence is effectively a normal response in certain situations, and both men and women tend not to sympathise with the victim. These attitudes are endorsed in gossip, folk tales, jokes and media cartoons. After the Office of the Status of Women released the results of the Public Policy Research Centre Survey in March 1988, for example, one media cartoon used the theme 'So you give your wife a bunch of flowers; I give mine a bunch of fives'. Other cartoons at that time attempted to ridicule the research findings by illustrating a woman beating, or threatening to beat, a man.

Such views have been evident for centuries. Straus and Gelles (1986) describe how Blackstone's codification of the common law in 1768 asserted that a husband had

the right to 'physically chastise' an errant wife, provided that the stick was no bigger than his thumb. In the Middle Ages women were burned at the stake for 'scolding and nagging'. Though today the laws have changed, the attitudes that support such laws have not changed that much.

Where attitudes are so entrenched, even by those who apply the law, it makes it unrealistic to pin hopes for change on the implementation of legislation alone. The main answer would appear to be a concerted, long-term, public education program to change attitudes towards domestic violence. Ultimately a change of attitude, it is hoped, together with the powers available in the new legislation, will have an effect on the behaviour itself. To some extent it may also be possible to change attitudes through behavioural change, for example, by adopting a policy of mandatory arrest which appears to reduce recidivism.

Public education on domestic violence issues has been under way for some time in individual Australian states and territories, starting with NSW in 1983. However the money available for such purposes has always been in short supply, necessarily having to take second place to the funding of victim services which is also insufficient to meet the need. Set against the enormity of the public education task, the scenario is daunting.

The Federal Government recognised the urgency of the need to reduce the incidence of domestic violence when it set up its National Education Campaign in 1987. It is anticipated that Campaign funding will support education programs established or planned at state level, and take public education one step further by mounting a co-ordinated, in-depth program that is not possible on limited state budgets. A Commonwealth/State Coordinating Task Force has been established to guide the Campaign, with the administration of Campaign activities directed by the Office of the Status of Women.

With the current funding and energy injected by Federal and state governments in Australia it may be possible to raise awareness levels in the community, but it will not be possible to achieve a reduction in the incidence of domestic violence. Major supplementary funding will be required to continue the admirable work undertaken so far.

Attitudes and behaviour patterns established and endorsed over centuries will not change overnight. But it is clear that they must change, because at present there is more danger for women and children in their own homes than there is out on the street.

Easteal (1988) highlighted a number of issues of importance for any campaign: that Australians understand the reality of domestic violence, its incidence and degree of injury, the effects on women and children, the family dynamics of battering, and that most victims only seek help after prolonged battering; that the myths about why women stay be confronted by the facts; that the non-criminal view of domestic violence be challenged; that the myth that women are solely responsible for marital stability be addressed; and that any campaign directed at Aboriginal or non-English speaking groups be designed to fit the social and cultural values of those groups.

Easteal points out the advantage of further research on perpetrators. 'Such material', she said, 'might enable self-identification by violators, surely a critical first step in intervention and prevention'. Yet previous education and service strategies in Australia and overseas have tended not to address the perpetrators, concentrating instead on the needs of victims for social and physical support. While victims' needs must remain paramount, it remains the case that the source of the problem is not being addressed. Perpetrators and potential perpetrators must be targeted, in public education campaigns, in service provision and in research programs. It is surely bizarre that the focus on victims has excluded attention to perpetrators. We would find it unbelievable if a wave of bank robberies resulted only in attention on banks or if an outbreak of fraud cases concentrated only on those defrauded.

Provided that resources are made available, the prognosis for change is quietly optimistic. After more than a decade of campaigning in the USA and Canada, it appears that community attitudes may be changing (MacLeod 1987, Easteal 1988) and the behaviour itself may not be quite so widespread (Straus & Gelles 1986).

No mistake should be made, however, about the enormity of the task ahead. If we take seriously Scutt's (1983) argument that domestic violence and the attitudes

which surround it are based both on deep-rooted assumptions about gender-roles and upon systematic economic and politico-legal inequalities between men and women, it follows that a campaign merely addressed to domestic violence is not enough. Those attitudes and inequalities themselves must be addressed before domestic violence can be removed.

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The National Committee on Violence welcomes submission and requests for information about any aspect of its terms of reference. These should be directed to:

Executive Assistant  
National Committee on Violence  
PO Box 28, Woden, ACT 2606.  
AUSTRALIA.

The Committee can also be contacted by phone on (062) 833 833 and by fax on (062) 833 843.



**Australian Institute of Criminology**  
PO Box 28, Woden, ACT 2606

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