

**Family Violence Initiatives:**  
**A Domestic Policy Proposal**  
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Submitted by:

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## **Family Violence Initiatives: A Domestic Policy Proposal**

Family violence is a pervasive societal problem. Each year 4 million American women are battered by their husbands or partners. 21% to 30% of American college students report at least one occurrence of physical assault from a dating partner. 37% of all obstetrical patients across race, class and educational lines are physically abused while pregnant. FBI data indicates that 30% of all female homicide victims each year are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.

Family violence results in more injuries to women requiring medical treatment than rape, auto accidents and muggings combined. Up to 35% of women visiting hospital emergency rooms are there due to injuries sustained as a result of family violence. The danger of domestic abuse increases rather than decreases upon separation. In 75% of domestic assaults reported to law enforcement, the victims is already separated or divorced from the abuser at the time of the incident. There is a 32% probability that a battered woman will be re-victimized by her abuser within the six months following any assault.

While many view family violence as solely a women's issue, and it is true that the vast majority of family violence victims are women, family violence has profound negative effects on all who are subject to it, as victims or as witnesses -- men, women and children. There is a strong correlation between spouse abuse and child abuse. When children are present in an abusive home, the children will also be abused over 70% of the time. Witnessing violence in the home detrimentally effects children whether or not they are subject to physical abuse themselves. Children who witness abuse at home have significant emotional and behavioral problems -- withdrawal, suicidal gestures, insomnia, anxiety, phobias, difficulty concentrating in school, depression, feelings of worthlessness, decreased cognitive abilities, truancy, temper tantrums, and violence toward others. Children growing up in violent homes are: 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault crimes, 6 times more likely to commit suicide, 50% abuse drugs and alcohol and 74% commit crimes against others as children.

Men who grew up in violent homes bear the long term consequences of that experience. Many are incarcerated early in life for attempting to intervene to stop the violence in their homes. 63% of the young men (ages 11-20) in jail for homicide have killed their mother's batterer. A San Quentin study of inmates who were jailed for violent crime found that 100% of the inmates had been victims of or witnesses to family violence as children. Finally, men who witnessed family violence as children repeat that pattern of violence against their own intimate partners. 81% of batterers report witnessing battering in their homes as children and the sons of the most violent parents are 1000% more likely to batter their own spouses than sons of non-violent parents.

It is clear that family violence affects every person in America, either personally or through the costs we pay as a society for failing to recognize and resolve an issue that devastates the lives of millions of men, women and children each year. The difficulty and danger in leaving battering relationships, combined with the batterer's intimate knowledge about every aspect of a victims' life, make solutions that will bring an end to family violence



complex. However, we have learned much in the past 20 years about how to curb the tide of violence in the home. The solution to domestic violence and the multitude of family issues associations with it requires a coordinated, interdisciplinary approach.

Most often the first contact a family violence victim has with someone who can offer help is in the health care system. Workers throughout the health care system must be trained to identify the signs of family violence and to not only treat the victims wounds, but to offer education about the laws and services that exist to assist family violence victims. Offering information that family violence is a crime through the health care system sends an important message that the victim can turn to medical professionals for support and referrals. Referrals provide the victim with information about family violence shelters and legal services. Victims who have secured safe shelter for themselves and their children will next need to find permanent, safe housing and develop a level of financial security that enables them to survive apart from their batterers. Important components of financial security include obtaining child support, public benefits, job training, child care and ultimately employment. Securing health insurance to cover the cost of physical treatment and counseling for the victim and her children is critical. Victims of family violence identify lack of financial security as the most difficult hurdle they must overcome in creating a violence free life. While family violence victims contribute toward enlarging the number of single parent households living in poverty, family violence victim's resilience and willingness to work to surmount difficulties makes them the group most likely to move quickly off reliance on public benefit programs.

The Clinton Administration has an opportunity to make meaningful and fundamental changes in the fabric of the legal, administrative and social service systems that have a dramatic impact on families, women and children. Today's struggle to assure the security and safety of family members in the home occupies a similar place of historical importance to the health and well being of American society as the fight for civil rights in the 60's. Presidential leadership today on this issue making prevention of violence in America's homes a central part of the domestic agenda can profoundly accelerate positive social change. This presidential strategy will also make exponentially more successful efforts by Congress, family violence advocacy groups, organizations fighting poverty and working toward child support assurance, the American Medical Association, national judicial organizations and others to forge solutions to a panoply of problems that plague American families.

Among the issues affecting families, family violence is one of those very few issues in which articulating a national policy priority can have significant immediate impact. For example, in 1990 both houses of Congress unanimously passed House Congressional Resolution 172 urging states to enact legislation creating a presumption against awarding custody of children to batterers. Less than two years following the passage of H. Con. Res. 172, approximately 38 states had amended their family laws to incorporate this federal policy statement.

President-Elect Clinton should establish a special office or commission within the White House whose primary purpose would be to advise the President on the development of a national policy approach on family issues and domestic violence. That office would direct White House policy setting a new tone and sending a new message that resolution of the

problems of family violence, child support, and other family issues are a national priority. The office would keep abreast of the latest developments on family issues at local, state and national levels so as to advise the administration what about policy statements that could be made or federal agency resources that could be used toward resolution to further social change benefitting families.

Failure to develop creative multi-dimensional solutions to family problems now, will inevitably result in ever increasing costs associated with crime, substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness and welfare dependency. Changing the way we respond to family problems will not necessarily require substantially greater resources that we are presently spending on the problems that have been caused by our failure to address family problems in the past. Vast improvements could also be made by setting priorities for government agencies, requiring them to marshal existing resources that can be used to benefit family violence victims. The six most urgent priorities essential for ending family violence are:

***PASSAGE OF THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT*** -- This Act provides for interstate enforcement of protection orders, encourages arrest in spouse abuse cases, authorizes funding for shelters and shelter related services, provides funding for support services to victims of family violence and for training of police, prosecutors and judges, requires uniform national record keeping, preserves confidentiality of victim's addresses, and educates youth about family violence. Urging swift passage of this legislation will put batterers on notice that family violence is a crime that will not be tolerated. The bill provides funding for many initial costs necessary for the development of a workable criminal justice system approach to family violence from upgrading computer systems to training police personnel, to developing model successful programs.

***SECURING ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES*** -- The first step millions of spouse abuse victims take when escaping violence in the home is to seek shelter. It is estimated that existing shelters in the United States house less than one tenth of the family violence victims who need shelter. In addition to shelter, victims need counseling, food, transportation, and child care. An infusion of resources into services assisting family violence victims today, will prevent spending exponentially more on treating recurring injuries and prosecuting and jailing the children who grow up in violent homes. An appropriate funding level for FY 1993 would require an appropriation of \$55 million dollars.

***TRAINING AND JOB PLACEMENT*** -- For family violence victims to survive and support their children, it is essential that they be able to obtain financial security. The Clinton Administration could require that existing federal job training and placement programs (i.e. Job Training Partnership Act) establish a program admission priority for victims of violence in the home. This change would not require additional funds and could be made within the first 100 days after taking office. Job training and placement programs for victims should offer training for jobs with economically viable wage earning capacities for single parent heads of household, rather than poverty level positions.



**NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE** -- Increasingly, lack of access to health care is becoming a growing problem that serves to keep battered spouses in violent relationships. If fleeing a violent home risks loss of access to resources to pay for health care, victims remain longer in violent relationships. To fully serve the needs of family violence victims and their children a National Health Plan must pay for emergency and long term treatment of injuries, for training of health professionals and for the development of hospital protocols that protect family violence victims. Any national health insurance should also pay the costs of counseling for the family violence victim and her children and must pay the cost of indigent batterer's counseling.

**HOUSING** -- Temporary shelter for battered women does not begin to address the permanent housing needs. Presently a family violence victim who cannot obtain shelter and who cannot live safely in the marital home must become homeless before she can qualify to obtain housing assistance on an expedited basis. The Clinton Administration should immediately give family violence victims priority to obtain housing assistance without requiring them to become homeless. Federal regulations could be immediately changed to allow two or more family violence victims to live together with their children in public housing, Section 8 housing and other federally supported programs. The administration should also commit to developing new and rehabilitated owner-occupied housing for battered women and children.

**LEGAL SERVICES** -- In addition to securing housing victims of family violence must be able to secure legal assistance in obtaining protection orders, divorce, custody, child support and other matters. A 1990 study by the National Institute of Justice found that victims who turned to the courts for protection without a lawyer, received fewer protection orders and those issued were much less effective. During the past two administrations funding for legal services to the poor have been slashed and programs have focused their efforts on very limited areas of law. While a few programs in some states do some work representing family violence victims, family violence work has never been a major priority for legal services programs. While there are a few volunteer attorneys across the country who represent victims of family violence, volunteers will never be able to provide all the services that are needed. The Clinton Administration could have a profound effect upon assistance to battered spouses and children by shifting Legal Service Corporation's priorities toward legal representation of family violence victims and increasing funding for legal services programs.

These programs represent the most immediate needs. A comprehensive policy aimed at family violence prevention, removal of societal and governmental impediments that encourage family violence, and resolution of other significant family problems would include coordinated efforts that would involve additional federal and state agencies. These should include:

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES** -- President-Elect Clinton could create an office within HHS to administer federal funding for shelters and shelter related services. Many HHS programs are of crucial importance to families and are important

To ensure the health and welfare of families, women and children across the country, we must develop a comprehensive national approach to the various interrelated problems affecting families -- family violence, child support, child care, and poverty. Presidential attention to the problem of family violence at this time can make a vast difference in our ability to dramatically improve the lives of millions of men, women and children in the United States.

There is a clear need for presidential attention to the problems faced by families including family violence. Creating an office within the White House would greatly enhance President-Elect Clinton's ability to direct national policy affecting families and to coordinate the allocation of federal agency resources toward resolving family violence and other family problems. To discuss this proposal further, please contact Leslye E. Orloff.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Abuse takes many forms: emotional torment, verbal, sexual assault, threats and physical force or injury.

Domestic violence is a learned behavior that increases in frequency and severity.

Battery is the single greatest cause of injury to women of all ages, more common than auto accidents, muggings and rapes. Most assaults are never reported.

In this country, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds. One-third of all women homicide victims are killed by their husband or partner. One out of four women will be abused during their lives.

Domestic violence occurs in 33%-66% of all adult cohabitating relationships regardless of age, race, sex, religious affiliation, marital status, education, income or social standing. These facts also apply to teenage date abuse.

Abusers tend to exhibit "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" behaviors, showing extremes in both kindness and cruelty. Others seldom see or suspect this person of explosive rage.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

## DANGEROUS MYTHS

*I shouldn't get involved. It's none of my business.*

**Not getting involved won't make the violence disappear; it only ensures that more victims will suffer.**

*Why doesn't she just leave him?*

**Many factors make it difficult for the victim to escape: financial problems, breakup of the family, impact on the children, pressure from family members, fear of future violence, or feeling responsible for the behavior and concern for what will happen to the abuser.**

*She doesn't look like a battered woman.*

**Domestic violence may involve verbal, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse, social isolation, or financial dependence. 95% of domestic violence survivors are women. 5% of the victims are men.**

*At least the children weren't abused.*

**Nearly 75% of men who abuse their partners also abuse their children. The batterer may force the children to witness the abuse, as a means of asserting his control. Children who grow up in abusive households are 42% more likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence as adults.**

*It's the victim's fault.*

**No one has the right to inflict bodily injury upon another. Blaming a victim won't save his or her life - it only justifies the abuser's behavior.**

*He hits her because he drinks.*

**Substance abuse does not cause domestic violence but it may be a contributing factor. Batterers will abuse their partners whether they are drunk or sober. Treating the alcoholism - without treating the violence - will only result in a sober abuser.**

## DEFINITIONS

Domestic Violence: Use or threat of physical force by a member of a household against another member of the same household.

Battering: Repeatedly subjecting a victim to forceful physical, social, sexual, and psychological behavior in order to coerce them without regard to their rights.

Physical Violence includes slapping, choking, punching, kicking, pushing and the use of objects as weapons.

## ACTION ITEMS

1. **Educate** yourselves, your organization, your community.
  - Invite speakers from resource agencies to your meetings.
  - Investigate services provided by local & state governments and diocesan offices.
  - Read "When I Call For Help," and "Confronting a Culture of Violence," responses to domestic violence and violence in society by the Catholic bishops.
2. **Advocate** that the medical, legal, and law enforcement communities, clergy, deacons, and parish personnel, including secretaries, receptionists, and religious education teachers, be educated on domestic violence issues. Be a voice for change in public policy.
3. **Donate** to shelters:
  - personal hygiene kits
  - towels and bedding.
  - clothing (check with shelter first)
  - diapers, children's toys
  - first aid supplies
  - TV's, VCR's, nonviolent videos
  - children & adult books
  - money (in memory of loved one)
4. **Drive** victims to doctor's appointments, counseling and court dates.
5. **Teach** life skills: budgeting, banking, filling out job applications, grooming for the workplace, etc.
6. **Cook** meals and provide food.
7. **Serve** on the board of an abuse shelter.



## WHAT CAN BE DONE

### IF YOU ARE A VICTIM:

1. Call the police or sheriff. Insist on a report.
2. Seek medical care immediately. Let the doctor know you've been abused.
3. Keep detailed records of incidents of abuse.
4. Arrange to stay with friends, family, rent a room, or call the shelter for emergency housing. Your safety is the bottom line.
5. Do not let your partner isolate you from those who can help you in the future. Talk to someone you trust.
6. Violence occurs in cycles: 1) tension building, 2) blow up, and 3) the honeymoon phase where women believe the promise that "It will never happen again." Don't let your hope for relief get in the way of protecting yourself from further abuse.
7. Think how your partner usually prevents you from leaving and prepare for that possibility. Trust your instincts. Plan ahead. When a violent episode is imminent, leave before the attack happens.

### IF YOU KNOW A VICTIM:

1. Believe her/him. Doubting or minimizing the abuse only heightens the victim's feelings of guilt, fear and helplessness.
2. Support her/him. Give them encouragement, information and referrals to agencies/services.
3. Speak out. Make the problem of abuse heard. Awareness precedes choice, choice precedes change.
4. Strongly suggest individual counseling for the victim. Experts report that counseling the couple together may be too intimidating for the victim.
5. Approach the victim in private.
6. Use non-judgemental language and empathetic approach such as:
  - "I'm afraid for your safety."
  - "I'm afraid for the safety of your children."
  - "We're here for you when you are ready or when you are able to leave."
  - "You deserve better than this."

## BE PREPARED

Have quick access to the following items:

1. This pamphlet.
2. A plan of action.
3. Important telephone numbers and addresses.
4. Cash.
5. Blank checks and savings account numbers.
6. Change of clothes for you and your children.
7. Keys (have extras made and hide them outside the house).
8. Personal documents: medical and income tax records, birth certificates, protective injunctions, tax returns, Social Security numbers of self and children, etc
9. Try not to leave without your children. In most cases it is easier for you to keep the children if they are already with you.

## LOCAL RESOURCES

*Women and men are created in God's image;  
the Bible doesn't sanction abusive behavior.*

This brochure was produced through grants from Associates of NCCW, Inc., and the American Council of Life Insurance.

# WOMEN HEALING THE WOUNDS

NCCW  
Responds to Domestic  
Violence Against Women



National Council of Catholic Women  
1275 K Street, NW, Suite 975  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-682-0334  
FAX 202-682-0338



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