

## by Catharine M. Venzon

There is a quote that the true measure of a society can be judged by the laws it enacts to protect its weak. This country can take pride that it can now be judged in a more favorable light as the Department of Justice has recently created within itself a Violence Against Women Office. Attorney General Janet Reno named Bonnie Campbell, the former Attorney General of Iowa, Director of this newly created office. It is to be hoped that as the office takes action to oppose family violence, there will be a new beginning in the American way of life.

The Department of Health and Human Services has determined that **domestic violence is the number one cause of injury and/or death to women**

. According to a Department of Justice press release in March, 1995, each year three to four million women are victims of family violence. More than two-thirds of violent crimes against women are committed by husbands, boyfriends, or someone known to the woman. One third of all women killed in the U.S. die at the hands of a husband or boyfriend. And, according to a 1989 study by Bowker, Arbitill & McFerron,

**seventy percent of men who batter women also batter their children**

. This makes the presence of spousal abuse the single most identifiable risk marker for predicting child abuse.

Numerous studies have revealed that there is no single personality profile of a batterer. It's been found that a risk-marker profile can help to identify certain individuals who may be batterers and situations that can increase the likelihood of abuse, but, unfortunately, the profile cannot be used to predict violence.

Risk markers include:

- witnesses and/or experiencing violence in a childhood home
- chronic alcohol abuse or illicit drug use
- low self-esteem/status related to employment in comparison to education
- feeling inadequate in comparison to and incompatibility with a partner's employment achievements

Domestic abuse has many forms, physical as well as psychological. Each one seeks control. However, it must be pointed out that abuse isn't restricted to gender. While the majority of

abusers are men and the majority of victims are women and children, men also suffer from physical and psychological abuse.

In *Treating Men Who Batter: Theory, Practice, and Programs*, the author includes the following examples of psychological abuse:

- **coercion and threats**-to kill the battered woman or others, to take the children away, to destroy her financially, or coerce her into illegal activity such as drug trafficking or prostitution
- **intimidation**-displaying weapons, destroying objects, making menacing gestures
- **isolation**-limiting use of the telephone, contact with others, or access to transportation
- **minimization, denial and blaming**-the abuser denies the violence, will not acknowledge that it is a problem, or blames the victim ("We're both guilty")
- **use of children to control**-relaying intimidating threats through the children, or using custody or visitation proceedings to gain access to the battered woman to control her whereabouts
- **use of economic resources**-unilaterally maintaining exclusive access to cash, credit cards, bank accounts, accruing debt in the battered woman's name, withholding child support payments.
- **use of "male privilege"**-making unilateral decisions about where to live, major purchases, and whether the woman is employed outside the home
- **induced debility**-through deprivation of sleep or food
- **monopolization of perceptions**-limiting access to information
- **emotional abuse and degradation**-including name calling and insults
- **induced altered states of consciousness**-through hypnotic induction or forced alcohol or drug use
- **occasional indulgences**-designed to perpetuate the victim's hope that the violence and abuse will end.

In order to address the problems of domestic violence in Erie County, a volunteer citizens group was formed in 1994 by Amherst women who believed that a task force was needed to assist the Family Offense Unit in Erie County. This volunteer group is the Amherst Domestic Violence Task Force. As of May 1995, Laurie Russ, Chairperson of the Task Force, said there are fifty current members, including survivors of domestic violence, police, judges, elected officials, lawyers, social workers, psychologists, nurses, teachers, students, and human service agencies.

The task force's mission is to educate the community about domestic violence in an effort to prevent the abuse, link victims with services, mobilize community services, and enhance the community's domestic violence response system.

On January 1, 1996, in Erie County, Justice John F. O'Donnell was appointed as the coordinating Judge of the new Domestic Violence Unit. Justice O'Donnell believes that the new Family Violence Act indicates that the State wants everyone to take a more serious approach to family violence, and that the State concern is consistent with the growing concern of the legislature and State Chief Judge. He points out that long before the O.J. Simpson trial and the passage of the new Domestic Violence Act, the legislature and Chief Judge have had a task force which handles judges' training on family violence.

Sadly, domestic violence is a part of American society and a way of life for many people. But there are now new laws that reflect society's acknowledgement that abuse, neglect, battery and degradation within the sanctity of a relationship is not acceptable, and ignoring these acts of violence no longer will be tolerated. There is now an acknowledgement that no one is immune from domestic violence

**Domestic Violence Hotline: (24 hrs.)**

**1-800-942-6906**

**Spanish (9 AM-5 PM) 1-800-942-6908**

**Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-342-3720**