

# Ending Domestic Violence

Changing Public  
Perceptions/Halting  
The Epidemic

Ethel Klein  
Jacquelyn Campbell  
Esta Soler  
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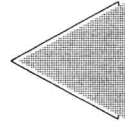
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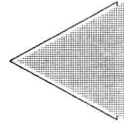
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
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# Introduction



 Violence against women by their intimate partners is at least as old as recorded history and constitutes the most prevalent form of violence (in terms of proportions of people victimized) around the world (World Bank Report, 1993). It affects more women in the United States than any other form of violence and is responsible for significant mortality, injury, and threats to women's physical and mental health (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995). A cornerstone of the public health approach to any health problem is primary prevention, or preventing the problem from occurring at all. Public education and opinion are the keys to primary prevention, and media campaigns are increasingly used to inform and shape public opinion on health-related issues. Yet there have been surprisingly few scientific surveys of public knowledge and attitudes about domestic violence upon which to base primary prevention media education efforts. *Ending Domestic Violence* addresses that gap.

## Public Perception Survey

This book is based on public opinion data gathered for the Family Violence Prevention Fund in 1992, prior to the development of a national public education campaign aimed at reducing the incidence of violence against women and promoting women's right to safety in the home, as well as subsequent research conducted in 1994-1996 to evaluate the efficacy and impact of that effort. The Advertising Council sponsored the campaign, bearing half the cost of the research.

In formulating the campaign, our hypothesis was that violence could be reduced by changing the attitudes of the American public about violence against women and by increasing societal involvement in the problem. The effectiveness of any primary prevention campaign depends in part on the accuracy of its perception of the attitudes it is trying to change. To plan the campaign, it was necessary to gather data about the popular understanding of domestic violence and its associated images and language.

The national public education campaign that resulted from this strategic research, called *There's No Excuse for Domestic Violence*, was launched in July 1994. The public service announcements (PSAs) produced as a part of this effort reflect research findings on how best to shape public opinion about—and ultimately, public behavior on—domestic violence. The research also adds to our general knowledge about domestic violence in the United States—including detailed information about who has been affected by the problem, who has taken some action to end the epidemic, and what some of the barriers to involvement are.

Scientists from all disciplines agree that the public context is an important determinant of the occurrence, nature, and targets of violence, although they disagree about its degree of importance. Domestic violence survivors, as well as advocates, policymakers, and scientists in the field, agree that public attitudes must change in order to end violence against women in their homes.

Witnessing domestic violence strongly affects how people perceive domestic violence and their attitudes about prevention and intervention. The research described in this book addresses for the first time the impact that witnessing domestic violence has on people's tolerance of violence and informs us about how to advise people to respond when they witness an incident of domestic violence. Does intervention place *them* in danger? Does *not* intervening or turning away encourage (or at least fail to discourage) the abusive behavior? The survey results provide some answers.

## Survey Methodology

The appendixes of this publication present a detailed explanation of the methodology for each of the research studies described. The following is an overview. During the first stage of the research, prior to the development of the *There's No Excuse* initiative, EDK Associates worked with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to gather data from 12 focus groups in five cities nationwide—three groups of white women, two of white men, two of African American women, one of African American men, and one each of Latino and Asian American men and Latina and Asian American women. The Latino groups were conducted in Spanish. Each group's facilitator matched the members' ethnicity;

members' education level varied. Each group comprised an average of 10 participants. All the meetings were audiotaped and transcribed. Researchers analyzed both latent and manifest content to determine first the text and presentation for use in the next stage of research—the survey. Verbatim quotes from the groups also illustrate and amplify the survey results. This set of research will be referred to henceforth as the EDK focus groups.

On the basis of information gathered through the focus groups, EDK Associates developed a national public opinion survey and conducted a national random telephone interview of 1,000 people ages 18 and over, with an equal number of males and females. To allow for demographic analysis across gender and ethnicity, we included an additional, shortened telephone interview, using the same questions, of 300 Latinos and 300 African Americans. This research shall be referred to in the text as the EDK poll or EDK survey.

Beginning in 1994, the Family Violence Prevention Fund partnered with Lieberman Research, Inc., to track public opinion about domestic violence over the course of its *There's No Excuse* campaign, in order to evaluate the efficacy of the campaign and prevailing attitudes and behavior on the issue of violence against women. In addition to a benchmark wave of polling that took place in July 1994, immediately prior to the distribution of the campaign's first round of advertising, subsequent waves of national polling were conducted in November 1994–February 1995, November 1995, and October 1996. Each wave of polling consisted of a random sample of at least 700 Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) with women and men 18 to 65 years of age (divided equally between genders). As this book went to press, results from the final wave of polling in October 1996 were not ready for release and therefore are not reported in this publication. The methodology for each wave of polling is reported in greater detail in Appendix C. These surveys shall be henceforth referred to as the Lieberman polls or surveys, along with the corresponding date.

Finally, we do not dispute that women both engage in abusive behavior toward men and are sometimes the primary perpetrators in abusive relationships. However, we are convinced that the most severe violence, that which causes injury, is most often directed at women by men (Bachman, 1994). Our surveys demonstrate that the public is primarily concerned with diminishing the problem of domestic violence perpetrated by men against women, and that is the focus of this publication.

## **Ethnicity and Class**

The research presented here adds to our knowledge about the relationship of ethnicity to public perceptions and experiences of domestic violence, a subject



that has been largely overlooked in the literature. Domestic violence is embedded within the framework of a patriarchal culture that permits men to beat women. To ignore culture and its intertwining relationship with race and ethnicity is to ignore an important part of the explanations and the solutions regarding domestic violence. In an effort to be sensitive to the issue of ethnicity, the research reported here included focus groups of different ethnicities led by people of that same culture. In addition, our 1992 baseline EDK poll used oversampling in the primary ethnic groups to obtain a diverse, multiethnic representation. We also sampled across educational categories among all ethnicities and used education as a control variable to avoid confounding class factors as they intersect with ethnicity.

Women's income and occupation are also problematic as indicators of "class"-related values for women. They are too often determined by marital status, age of children, and/or a husband's or partner's preferences. Women and people of color of both genders are excluded from certain occupations because of discrimination. Therefore, they are not represented in income categories that would otherwise be commensurate with their education and value systems. For these reasons, we used education as the most salient proxy across genders and ethnic groups for socioeconomic status (SES).

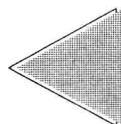
With respect to the Lieberman polls, although non-Anglo ethnic groups were sampled proportionate to their percentages in the general population, the failure to appropriately oversample resulted in ethnic groupings that were too small to interpret differences with confidence. Thus these additional polls provide the most recent information about the current landscape of public opinion about domestic violence, but they are not as complete as the EDK poll demographically.

To enrich our understanding of the cultural context as it relates to domestic violence, a woman of color from the three major ethnic groups represented in the research (African American, Latina, and Asian American), each an expert in domestic violence, contributed to the findings and conclusions of the study. They collaborated on Chapter 5 ("Water on Rock") and assisted us in interpreting the survey results specific to their ethnic group. The three authors are Doris Campbell, Ph.D., R.N., professor of nursing at the University of Florida and a member of the Florida Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence; Sara Torres, Ph.D., R.N., associate professor and associate dean of nursing at the University of Maryland and an expert on the cultural context (especially Latina) of violence against women; and Beckie Masaki, executive director of the Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco, a member of the board of directors of the Family Violence Prevention Fund, and an expert on Asian American women's responses to intimate partner violence. We want to acknowledge formally the importance of their contribution.

## Text Overview

Chapter 1, “Domestic Violence in Public Context,” details the history of the battered women’s movement, including a discussion of important changes in public concern about the problem. Chapter 2, “Violence as Part of Everyday Life,” examines public perceptions of the extent of domestic violence, as well as people’s own personal experience of the problem. The public attribution of blame for domestic violence is discussed in Chapter 3, “Why Does Domestic Violence Happen?” Chapter 4, “Drawing the Line,” looks at the point at which the public is willing to intervene. Chapter 5, “Water on Rock,” described above, focuses on ethnicity. The implications of this research for changing public opinion and behavior are explored in Chapter 6, “Public Education Campaigns on Domestic Violence.” The appendixes describe the methodologies used in the research reported in this book. *Ending Domestic Violence* offers a cogent and detailed picture of how Americans perceive the issue of domestic violence at the turn of the 20th century, and how best to persuade them to get involved in putting an end to it in the 21st. The Family Violence Prevention Fund’s *There’s No Excuse for Domestic Violence* campaign is only a first step in that process.

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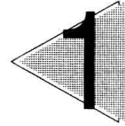


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# Domestic Violence in Public Context



## Historical Context

One of the great achievements of feminism was to define wife beating as a social problem, not merely a phenomenon of particular violent individuals or relationships. Women have historically resisted battering—physically. But in the past hundred years, they began to resist it politically and ideologically, with considerable success (Gordon, 1988).

Some recorded vestiges do exist showing examples of public protest against wife beating from Roman times and during the French Revolution (Campbell, 1991; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). However, the first well-documented political campaign against wife battering, known as the first wave of feminism, took place in Great Britain in the late 19th century (May, 1978). In contrast, the United States addressed domestic violence in the late 19th century only as a part of the temperance, child welfare, and social housekeeping movements (Gordon, 1988). Wife abuse in America was seen as disreputable but not a topic for public discussion, let alone protest.

In a contemporary review of child abuse cases in Boston, Gordon (1988) found that women whose husbands abused their children considered their *own* abuse by the husband inevitable. They tried to resist by fleeing, fighting back, calling the police or other community agents, appealing to kin, or asking for the abuser's sympathy. Throughout history, women have used these same strategies. In postrevolutionary France, divorce petitions from the city of Lyon document battered women's experiences (Campbell, 1991). Evidence of wife beating is also seen in Abigail Abbot Bailey's account from 18th century New Hampshire (Taves, 1989); Mark Mathabane's (1994) report of a grandmother's, mother's,

and sister's abuse in 20th-century South Africa; and numerous accounts by women from around the world who have been beaten by their male intimate partners (Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1992). The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Yet, in the 20th century, social and political changes *have* occurred, and women of all countries are beginning to believe that they have the right to live without violence. Battered women are realizing that they are not alone; they have seen too many women like themselves on television talk shows to feel as isolated as their counterparts did as recently as 20 years ago. Since that time, wife beating has become a common topic for public debate, if not public censure, in most countries. This monumental shift in both public and private perception is the result of the sustained effort by the grassroots battered women's movement over the past two decades.

### History of the Battered Women's Movement

The battered women's movement began with the second wave of feminism in the United States in the early 1970s. Its strength and success drew on the previous social influences of the antiwar and civil rights campaigns of the 1960s. Battered women's efforts also stemmed from earlier protests against sexual assault that were some of the first expressions of feminist activism decrying violence toward women. As Susan Schechter (1982) pointed out, 1970s feminism created both a climate for women to speak out about violence and a structure through which they could organize.

Shelters for abused women arose in every major community in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Often founded by coalitions of formerly battered women, feminist activists (some closely aligned with organizations such as the National Organization for Women [NOW]), and veterans of rape crisis centers, the shelters are a wonderful example of the ability of grassroots organizations to render services for individual women and for social change. From their inception, shelters have tried to provide public education and training for professionals in the criminal justice system and to offer leadership in legal reform as well as shelter, safety, and advocacy for battered women and their children.

### Research and the Battered Women's Movement

The "science" was right in step with the activism at first. The early books on wife abuse were models of scholarly products written for the public. Rebecca and Russell Dobash (1979) used a combination of historical research and interviews with battered women to substantiate their theoretical framework regarding patriarchy as the basic causative factor in wife beating. Dell Martin's

(1976) groundbreaking work first alerted the American public and scientific community to the realities of wife abuse. This research effectively refuted prior studies of wife abuse, specifically psychiatric case studies from the 1960s that emphasized the women's "masochistic tendencies" (e.g., Snell, Rosenwald, & Robey, 1964).

However, the statistical analysis, the sampling, and the measurement used in the early research were unsophisticated. The problem had become legitimized and some funding was available for further research, which attracted new scholars to the field. This new wave of researchers was not necessarily made up of activists or feminists. In general, these researchers conceptualized wife abuse as a form of "family violence" rather than as violence against women. They were primarily sociologists who relied heavily on interactive, family systems, and/or social learning theories of domestic violence causation (e.g., Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). For these sociologists, the abuse of intimate partners was originally seen as the extreme end of family *conflict*, and therefore an example of a family systems process, rather than as an instance of violence against women and a manifestation of the oppression of women.

This fundamental conceptual difference shaped the findings of the research, which was otherwise a model of telephone survey research. The sociological research on wife abuse provided the first national random survey (therefore scientifically persuasive) estimates of the prevalence of wife abuse as well as child abuse. These results legitimized national concern about the problem and were widely publicized.

Also publicized were data from the same surveys showing that women used abusive tactics in marital disagreements as often as men did. There has been no perfect and definitive survey research to date in the United States on the prevalence and incidence of domestic violence, and the gender controversy in terms of statistics as well as cause has continued to be a polarizing issue between the battered women's movement and some members of the research community. The conflict is often exploited in the popular press, to the detriment of scholars and laypersons alike.

## International Context

Battered women's movements developed in Canada and Western Europe during the same time period. Great Britain had led the way with the creation of the first wife abuse shelter in 1970. However, less industrialized countries are only just beginning to recognize the problem publicly and establish services. Worldwide statistics show that wife beating occurs in 84% of small-scale societies (Levinson, 1989) and 100% of more "developed" societies. When women in less industrialized countries were polled, they listed violence as the health problem of



greatest concern to them (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994). Yet wife beating was not officially considered under the purview of international action; rather, the emic view (from within the culture) was taken. The United Nations finally included violence against women as a human rights violation at its International Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna in 1993. That same year, the World Bank (1993) also recognized wife beating as a significant economic problem in terms of health costs. These official actions signaled inclusion in the public international domain (versus cultural normative and therefore private) and paved the way for increased official global efforts at prevention, alleviation, and incorporation in developmental and health programs (Desjarlais, Eisenberg, Good, & Kleiman, 1995).

### Sanctions Against Battering

Public sanctions against wife beating have been crucial to the field of domestic violence. In their cultural analysis of primary data from anthropologists about 14 distinct cultures worldwide, Counts et al. (1992) concluded that sanctions against abuse and sanctuary for beaten women were the most important factors in preventing occasional wife beating from escalating to more ongoing wife battering. Effective sanctions were applied by the community or neighborhood, rather than only national proclamations or laws, but such national attention often preceded local action.

In their study, Counts and her colleagues (1992) used primary ethnographic evidence collected from 14 different societies representing a range of geographic locations, level of industrialization, type of household arrangements, and degree of spousal violence. They examined evidence supporting the primary theoretical stances about battering from Western social sciences. Although the feminist (or patriarchal) theoretical premises received considerable support, several aspects were brought into question. The review suggested that all forms of violence against women could not be considered as aspects of the same phenomenon and that the status of women is an extremely complex, multifaceted phenomenon that may have a curvilinear rather than direct relationship with wife battering. In other words, women who are kept totally controlled by societal norms may not “need” to be beaten by individual male partners. At the lower end of the curve, where there is true gender equality across all the aspects of status and power, there would also be relatively little wife beating. At the center of the curve, where male and female gender roles and relative power are in flux and in contention, the most wife beating would occur. Although this proposition has not been tested, it is supported by other analyses (e.g., Levinson, 1989).

The Counts et al. (1992) review also demonstrated the importance of other societal influences on individual couples. Wife beating (defined as occasional and nonescalating, without serious or permanent injury, seen as ordinary by most