

Domestic Violence Education and Empowerment for North Carolina Victims of Domestic Violence

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Introduction

The Center for Disease Control has named men's violence against women as the number one health concern for women in the United States and abroad. It has become a problem of pandemic proportions ("Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women"). Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times* and author of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, claims that gender-based violence is one of the world's most common human rights abuses today. "Women worldwide ages 15 through 44 are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of cancer, malaria, war and traffic accidents combined" (Kristof). This horrifying reality can be stopped if it is brought into the limelight. I am pleased that the United Nations 57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has selected "elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls" as the priority theme. The consequences of violence against women and girls are far-reaching as they harm families, communities, and nations in every corner of the world.

For my WomenNC Commission on the Status of Women Fellowship, I decided to concentrate on domestic violence or intimate partner violence – the form of violence most commonly experienced by women globally ("In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women"). I will discuss domestic violence problems on international, national, and local levels and suggests methods for improvement while ultimately proposing a North Carolina best practice model.

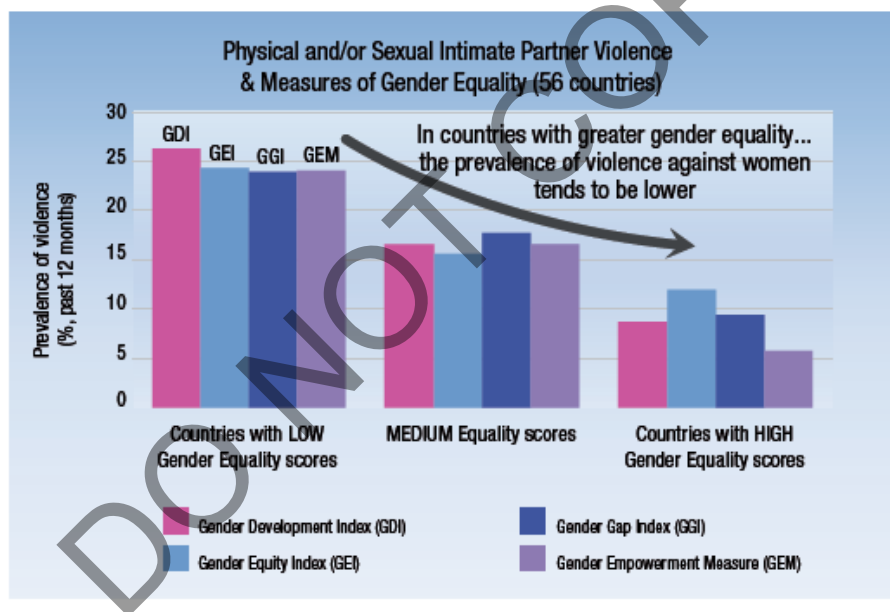
Domestic Violence

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence, commonly referred to as intimate partner violence or relationship violence, can be defined as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions that influence another person” (“Office on Violence Against Women: Domestic Violence”). Intimate partner violence includes behaviors that “intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone” (“Office on Violence Against Women: Domestic Violence”). This abuse can occur between intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating (“Office on Violence Against Women: Domestic Violence”). Despite popular myths, domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, age, sexual orientation, education level, religion, or gender (Despres).

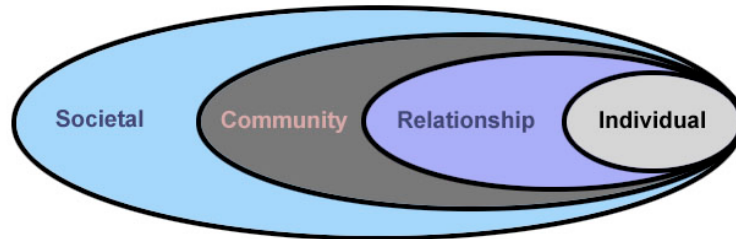
The United Nations “In-depth Study of All Forms of Violence Against Women” distinguishes the different types of abuse that occur during domestic violence. The physical violence involves using strength or a weapon to injure the victim. Abusive sexual contact, like an assault or rape, is included under sexual violence. Psychological and emotional violence involves controlling, humiliating, or isolating the victim. Some domestic violence also includes economic violence, most commonly when the man denies the woman access to basic resources and finances (“In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women”).

To understand domestic violence and effective methods of prevention, it is important to understand the causes. “Domestic violence is rarely caused by mental illness, but mental illness is often used as an excuse for domestic violence” (“NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence”). Cultural acceptance of gender inequality fuels domestic violence and many cases of men’s violence against women. As depicted below, countries are more likely to have higher rates of violence when there are lower rates of gender equality (“Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls”).



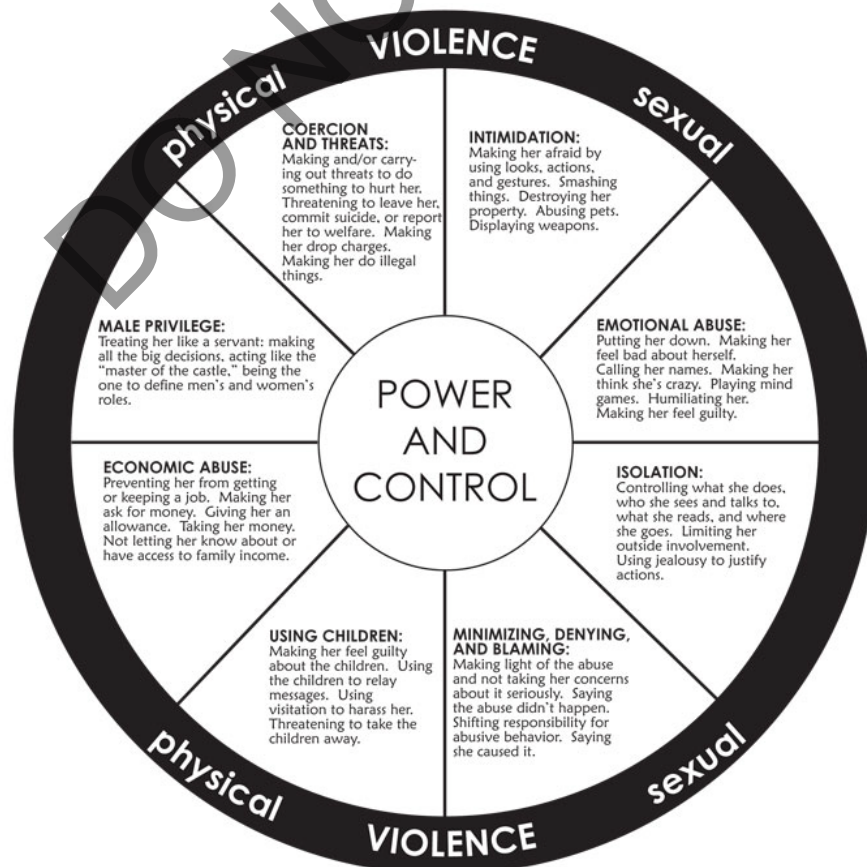
Our society promotes gender inequality by encouraging rigid gender roles and hyper-masculinity. Men must be dominant, in control, and strong while women are encouraged to be submissive and vulnerable. The unhealthy masculinity defined by society is manifested in our communities, relationships, and homes as demonstrated by the ecological model for understanding violence (“Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls”).

Ecological model for understanding violence



The ecological model considers the complex interplay between societal, community, relationship, and individual factors that contribute to violence.

Within intimate partner relationships, violence is perpetuated by a desire for power and control as illustrated by the wheel below ("Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls"). The power and control wheel exists to display the foundational problems that lead to and perpetuate domestic violence. The wheel is a helpful tool in understanding the patterns of abuse used by the perpetrator to establish and maintain control over the victim.



Economic Impacts of Domestic Violence

Aside from the detrimental effects intimate partner violence has on families and communities, there are also economic ramifications. The overall cost of domestic violence to the United States is \$5.8 billion per year with the health care cost totaling about \$4.1 billion each year ("Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women").

Intimate partner violence is also one of the top three causes of homelessness ("NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence"). In most cases, domestic violence affects the woman's ability to keep her job. In the United States, domestic violence victims lose an estimated 8 million paid workdays every year often due to injuries, embarrassment due to visible cuts or bruises, or because the abusive partner interferes with her ability to get to work ("NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence"). As the aforementioned information suggests, intimate partner violence not only has detrimental psychological effects, but also negative economic impacts.

A Personal Perspective

In order to look more closely at the issue of domestic violence, it is crucial to learn about a victim's personal story. Leslie Steiner, a Harvard College graduate, shared her story of domestic violence in a TED talk at the University of Washington. Steiner opens by explaining to the audience that she thought she was an extremely unlikely victim of domestic violence as an affluent, white, and educated woman. She then explains, "domestic violence happens to everyone. All races, all religions, all income and education levels. It's everywhere." Next, she tells the audience that she

“would have told you, that she was the last person on earth who would stay with a man who beat her” (Steiner).

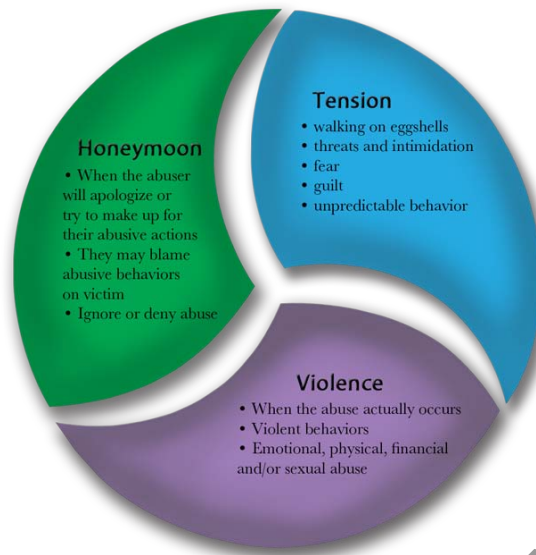
Steiner met Conner one afternoon on the New York City subway. They were both ivy-league graduates, successful young professionals, and they decided to see each other again. Steiner talks about how much Conner loved and respected her; she quickly becomes his everything. Steiner now equates this to the first step in domestic violence, “seduce and charm the victim” (Steiner). While in this “honeymoon” stage Conner was planning, as Steiner reveals, “domestic violence is a carefully laid physical, financial, and psychological trap.”

After they had been dating for a while, Conner suggests that they leave the city together and settle down. Steiner explains that the second step in domestic violence is to isolate the victim. Because Conner loved her so much and she loved him back, they left New York and moved to a small, rural town. Steiner says the first episode of abuse happened one week before their marriage. After Conner had wrapped his hands around her neck and beat her head against the wall, he began to apologize profusely. He explained that he was stressed and nervous but it would never happen again. Earlier in their relationship, Conner had divulged to her his deepest secret: he was abused as a child. Conner explained this abuse as a result of his troubled childhood. One week later, they were married. Over their honeymoon, he abuses her two more times. The abuse escalates as Conner continually beat her once or twice a week over the next two and a half years.

Steiner answers the question on everyone’s minds. “Why did I stay? The answer is easy. I didn’t know he was abusing me. Even though, he held those loaded

guns to my head, pushed me down stairs, threatened to kill our dog, pulled the key out of the car ignition as I drove down the highway, poured coffee grinds on my head as I dressed for a job interview, I never once thought of myself as a battered wife. Instead, I was a very strong woman in love with a deeply trouble man. And I was the only person on earth who could help Conner face his demons” (Steiner). She then describes how painful and sad this question feels to victims because “we victims know something you usually don’t. It’s incredibly dangerous to leave an abuser because the final step in the domestic violence pattern is to kill her. Over seventy percent of domestic violence murders happen after the victim has ended the relationship, after she’s gotten out. Because then the abuser has nothing left to lose” (Steiner). Steiner ultimately explains that she found the courage, “after one final sadistic beating”, to break the silence and start a new life without Conner. Steiner continues to tell her powerful story to debunk myths surrounding domestic violence and to offer hope and change to victims.

Steiner’s story clearly represents the cycle of violence most common among intimate partner or domestic violence. As shown at the top of the next page and demonstrated in Steiner’s story above, domestic violence usually starts out in the honeymoon phase. Slowly, the tension builds until there is violent behavior. The cycle starts over as the perpetrator apologizes and attempts to make up for the violent behavior. It is important to remember that the cycle does not always look the same. Each stage lasts different amounts of time in different relationships and the entire cycle can happen several times within one abusive relationship.



A “Global-to-Local” Perspective

While it is important to remember domestic violence victims are not just numbers, as evidenced by the story above, knowing the statistics allow one to understand the magnitude of the problem. I will present the domestic violence problem as it exists on the international, national, and local level. With each level, there are different solution methods. Finally, I will propose a successful North Carolina program working to combat domestic violence.

International Problem

Domestic violence continues to affect women everywhere; it knows no borders or boundaries. Globally, “up to seventy percent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime – the majority by husbands, intimate partners or someone they know” (“Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women”). After reviewing 50 population-based studies in 36 countries, results showed that the prevalence of physical violence by intimate partners ranged between ten and fifty percent (“In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women”). In Australia,

Canada, Israel, South Africa, and the United States, studies showed that forty to seventy percent of female murder victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends ("In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women"). In the Syrian Arab Republic, 21.8 percent of women had experienced violence in the family ("In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women"). In Colombia, every six days a woman is killed by her partner or former partner ("In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women"). In South Africa, a woman is killed every six hours by an intimate partner ("Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women"). Domestic violence and the countless side effects permeate families, communities, and governments in every country of the world.

International Solutions

On a global scale, there are many actions being taken to prevent violence against women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, has greatly improved conditions for women in many nations as it promotes social, behavior, and policy changes that work to end discrimination against women (UN Women). Another important advancement is The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This declaration provides guidance on strategic objectives and actions for the prevention of violence against women and girls (UN Women). These two broad initiatives continually improve rights for women.

National Problem

Kristof points out in his article "Is Delhi So Different From Steubenville?" that "Americans watched the events after the Delhi gang rape with a whiff of

condescension at the barbarity there, but domestic violence remains a vast problem across the United States.” According to the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, about 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Domestic violence continues to be “one of the most common causes of injury to women in the United States” (“NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence”). Each year in the United States, it is estimated that “over 468,000 visits to the Emergency Department are a result of physical abuse or rape by an intimate partner” (“NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence”). In many situations this abuse escalates as one-third of women murdered in the United States each year are killed by intimate partners (“Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women”). Often, the threats and dangers of domestic violence also affect the children living in the home as 15 million children are abused each year (Steiner).

National Solutions

The United States has a long way to go in addressing the problem of domestic violence and violence against women. On a national level, there are two steps the government needs to take in order to make progress. The first step is the ratification of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW. The U.S. is among a “small minority of countries that have not yet ratified CEDAW, including Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Nauru, Paula, and Tonga. The United States has the dubious distinction of being the only industrialized democracy that has not yet ratified this treaty” (“Amnesty International USA”). CEDAW, adopted by the United Nations in 1979, is an international, comprehensive agreement

on women's human rights. Presently, "it is the only international instrument that comprehensively addresses women's rights within political, civil, cultural, economic, and social life" ("Amnesty International USA"). To improve the conditions for women, the U.S. needs to ratify CEDAW.

In February 2013, the House and the Senate agreed to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), traditionally a bipartisan legislation. VAWA, originally passed in 1994, is an influential and crucial bill. Since VAWA was first enacted there has been an estimated 64 percent reduction in domestic violence. Since VAWA was enacted, "victims of domestic violence and rape didn't have to worry about whether their protection order would follow them from state to state if they moved, or whether their attacker would use their past sexual history against them in court. A major step forward that helped victims feels safer" (Miller). It is exciting to see Congress take the proper steps to move forward in preventing and eliminating violence against women in the United States.

North Carolina Problem

Violence against women affects the women of North Carolina as 1 in 5 women report experiencing physical abuse. In North Carolina in 2010, crisis lines received 120,666 calls, shelters served 7,466 adults and 6,047 children, and shelters in 26 counties were filled to capacity for more than 100 days. Between 2002 and 2012, there were 761 domestic violence homicides in North Carolina. This number only counts the women who died at the hands of domestic violence. ("NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence"). These numbers speak to the significance of this problem in our state. It is estimated that there are nine near-fatal

domestic violence incidents for every domestic violence homicide ("NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence"). Using that statistics, between 2002 and 2012, there were 6,849 near-fatal intimate partner violence incidents in the state of North Carolina.

North Carolina Solutions

North Carolina based solutions offer best-practice models that should be implemented in other communities, states, and nations. Dr. Macy, a sociologist working closely with domestic violence agencies, stresses the importance of comprehensive services for survivors with mental illness and substance abuse (Macy, Giattina, Parish, and Crosby). Agencies and programs must ensure that survivors of all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations, disabilities, and immigration statuses feel welcome to access services. Another challenge agencies face, are community norms. Often these agencies work to eradicate values, beliefs, and attitudes that encourage violence against women (Macy, Giattina, Parish, and Crosby). I will focus on one community based, collaborative, and comprehensive North Carolina solution: The MOVE Program.

MOVE: Mothers Overcoming Violence through Education and Empowerment

The MOVE Program is unique because it is a two-fold program run by two organizations. One agency, InterAct, plans and facilitates the portion of the program for mothers. The other agency, SAFEchild, coordinates the portion of the program for children. The partnership of these two agencies, as well as the focus on mothers and their children, are two of the reasons MOVE is an effective, groundbreaking program.

InterAct is a United Way agency that provides “safety, support, and awareness to victims and survivors of domestic violence and rape or sexual assault” (InterAct of Wake County). They provide crisis intervention, residential counseling, community education and training, youth education services, and rape intervention education. It is a comprehensive agency because the center involves nine collaborative partners that range from mental health services, family substance abuse counseling, after school tutoring, legal assistance, medical care, and the family violence intervention unit of the Raleigh Police Department (InterAct of Wake County). SAFEchild, an agency focusing on child abuse prevention and intervention, “works with parents, families, and caregivers to create nurturing environments, free from abuse and neglect” (SAFEchild Advocacy Center). The marriage of these two agencies provides a holistic program for both the mothers and their children.

The MOVE Program is a collaborative effort from InterAct and SAFEchild with funding from the Duke Endowment. MOVE’s mission is to “help mothers minimize the impact of domestic violence on their children. The program builds self-esteem, reduces isolation, and reinforces positive parenting...MOVE enables mothers to feel more competent and confident in their parenting role” (SAFEchild). The element of the program offered to children serves as both intervention and prevention because “children exposed to domestic violence and/or child abuse are at an increased risk for becoming a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence in adulthood” (“NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence”). Next, I will provide an overview of the program.

The MOVE Program serves mothers and their children referred to the program by the Department of Social Services or Domestic Violence court. It is extended over thirteen-weeks and teaches a different curriculum to the mothers and children each week. The program focuses on interpersonal violence, parenting, and safety (Macy, Ermentrout, and Rizo). Every week the group of about seven to nine participants meet together at the child abuse prevention agency. If needed, there is transportation provided to and from the meetings. Everyone, mothers and children, eats dinner together at the center before the meetings begin. There are separate group meetings for women and children, both facilitated by two social workers. The group setting is important because it “provides opportunities for peer learning and support, provides opportunities for participants to practice new skills, normalizes participants experiences with IPV and the justice system, and diminishes social isolation” (Macy, Ermentrout, and Rizo). Each meeting covers a different topic aligned with “the MOVE Program’s goals of:

1. Safety (safety planning, cycle of violence, red flags in future relationships, legal avenues)
2. Healthy Families (attributes of a health family, building a healthy family, abusive behavior in a family)
3. Support and Friendship (decrease isolation, build self confidence, build relationships, empower their parenting)
4. Building Self-Esteem (reduce internal blame, focus on strengths, positive feedback from peers)

5. Stress and Anger Management (identify 1st signs of anger, develop coping skills, build empathy, empower with discipline and communication skills)
6. Effects of Domestic Violence on Children (children blame themselves, common emotions, social issues, behavioral issues)
7. Positive Parenting Skills (understanding of age appropriate behavior, communication skills, positive discipline skills)
8. Community Resources (resources to meet family's need, services offered at Interact, SAFEchild follow-up group)" (Macy, Ermentrout, and Rizo).

As mentioned earlier, the Duke Endowment funds the MOVE Program.

Because it is fully funded, the program is offered at no cost to the families. This is vital because "most agencies describe funding as the single most important challenge they face" (Macy, Giattina, Parish, and Crosby). MOVE also provides security services during the program for staff, mothers, and children to ensure that they feel safe.

One mother shared her story after completing the MOVE Program:

"Before I came [to this program]...I felt I was stuck in the middle of a box and walls were surrounding me, and there was no way I could get out. Coming here let me know the resources and the help that I need, and I was able to [get out]" (Macy, Ermentrout, and Rizo).

This quote is a testament to the MOVE's Program ability to enhance participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Presently, a team is conducting research involving data collection, focus groups, interviews, and other qualitative data in order to evaluate the program. The

MOVE Program's innovative approaches and programming would be successful in both national and international application.

Conclusion

Despite the grave domestic violence problem, there is hope. In the United States, rates of domestic violence homicides have decline by almost 30% over the last 30 years ("NCCADV: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence"). This is a possible result of changing attitudes about violence as Kristof reports, "only half of Americans polled in 1987 said that it was always wrong for a man to beat his wife with a belt or a stick; a decade later, 86 percent said it was always wrong." Attitudes are changing and there are successful practices being implemented. The North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence issues a statement of belief necessary to adhere to when working for change: "We believe that through the power of our shared experiences and collective voice, we can work together to create individual, institutional, and cultural change. We will work intentionally and actively to create safe spaces for survivors of domestic violence. We believe the voice and experience of survivors must be the foundation of our work, and that the domestic violence movement can change society." Together, we can make our relationships, our dinner tables, our homes and families the safe and peaceful oasis they should be.

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