

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

LYNN MORIARTY

Director, Family Violence Project of Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles, California

In order to better understand family violence in the Jewish community, we must first understand the basic dynamics and issues connected with domestic violence in general. This article is based on the experience of a Jewish Family Service agency that has been providing domestic violence services to Jews and non-Jews for over thirteen years. Specific areas of interest and concern as they relate to domestic violence in the Jewish community are addressed.

While recent events have catapulted the issue of domestic violence against women to the forefront of the national consciousness, there remains much confusion, misinformation, and mythology about the causes of domestic violence, its impact on the individual victim and the community, and ways to address the problem. Indeed, even the definition of what constitutes battering differs according to who is providing the interpretation.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

The California Penal Code (273.5) defines domestic violence, a felony, as the willful inflicting of "corporal injury resulting in a traumatic condition" upon a spouse, cohabitant, or parent of one's child. Those who provide services to victims of domestic violence define it far more broadly as an increasingly frequent and severe cycle of physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and sexual abuse for the purpose of intimidation, instilling fear, and controlling behavior. This article uses the latter definition and always refers to the victim as a female. One of the few areas of agreement among domestic violence experts is that the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence are women—according to the U.S. Justice Department, around ninety-five percent—and that their abusers are almost always men.

Domestic violence takes many forms. A woman may be battered physically—pushed, punched, choked, or assaulted with a weapon.

She may be forced to commit sexual acts, intimidated by the destruction of her property, or threatened with the loss of her children. And because the batterer's purpose is to exercise control over his victim, she is likely to be abused in emotional ways as well. A batterer will frequently insult and put down his victim, isolate her from the outside world, and keep her economically dependent. He may denigrate her as "stupid" in front of her children or treat her as a servant, making all decisions for her.

Despite often repeated abuse, the average battered woman stays in her relationship for three to five years.¹ It is a common myth that battered women stay with their abusers because they are "masochistic." In fact, victims do not leave for a variety of reasons, including lack of money, education, or job skills; inadequate day care; lack of services or housing; emotional ties to the abuser; family needs—especially the need for the children to have their father; fear of losing custody of children; religious or cultural discouragement of divorce; alienation and isolation from family members; and the perception that no one, including the police, can help them.

The mechanics of the cycle of violence also help explain why battered women stay in abusive relationships.

¹Much of this general discussion is drawn from Walker (1979) and from my own twenty years of experience in this field.

- *Phase I:* In the first phase of the cycle, the tension between the couple increases in intensity. The woman tries to contain the abuser's rage and to please him in order to forestall a violent outburst. As the tension continues to build to an unmanageable level, the batterer, unable to contain himself, will find a trigger to "justify" his explosion, and the violence erupts.
- *Phase II:* This phase consists of the violence itself. It may last from a few seconds to—in extreme cases—weeks on end, and generally includes multiple forms of abuse.
- *Phase III:* During the "honeymoon" or final phase of the cycle, the batterer is loving and repentant and promises never to batter again. Both partners often deny the severity of the abuse in order to rebound. This is the most dangerous phase for the victim, who allows herself to believe that her partner will change. He does not, and over time the tension rebuilds and the cycle repeats itself. Generally, the incidents of abuse increase in frequency as the length of the cycle decreases, and it becomes impossible for the woman to escape without outside intervention. It is at this point that her victimization is complete.

The societal effects of family violence on society are wide ranging. A woman is beaten every fifteen seconds in the United States, and experts estimate that 50 percent of all women will be battered at some point in their lives. In 1994, in Los Angeles County alone, over 70,000 domestic violence-related calls were made to law enforcement agencies, and since many experts believe that most cases of domestic violence go unreported, this figure probably represents a small percentage of the actual incidents that occurred.

The financial repercussions of domestic violence are felt throughout society. The medical costs of treating battered women are estimated at over \$100 million per year (NCADV, 1991). The loss to businesses in diminished productivity and employee absenteeism is estimated at over \$5 billion yearly. Additionally, the costs of arresting and incarcerating perpetrators of domestic violence are

believed to be in the tens of millions (NCADV, 1995).

Domestic violence also leaves scores of victims in its wake. Many battered women are seriously injured, and some die at the hands of their abusers. More women are killed or seriously injured each year by their intimate partners than by rapes, muggings, and auto accidents combined. The former U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, has called domestic violence the nation's greatest health risk to women.

But not all abuse leaves such visible scars and bruises. Emotional abuse may severely damage the psyche of a once-healthy woman for years, even after she has left the relationship. The emotional effects of sustained battering include depression, suicidality, hypervigilance, intense fear, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as "learned helplessness." Battered women quickly learn that their behavior has no effect on what happens to them. Once this belief is firmly in place and is reinforced by continued abuse, the battered woman becomes passive and submissive and feels that attempts to change her situation (i.e., leaving) will be futile. Experts believe that the "learned helplessness" response may be another reason why women stay with abusive partners for long periods of time.

Children are also victims of domestic violence. Most women seeking services for the crime of domestic violence are between the ages of 18 and 37 and are mothers of minor children. Most occupants of battered women's shelters have children. According to Los Angeles Grand Jury statistics, in 70 percent of homes where domestic violence occurs, the children are also physically abused. Even those who are not physically battered suffer trauma as a result of witnessing their mother's abuse. The California Department of Child and Family Services considers all children residing in homes where violence occurs to be crime victims, whether or not they have been physically attacked. In these cases, Suspected Child Abuse Reports are filed by service providers, who, in California, are required to report all cases of suspected abuse.

The effects of growing up in a violent home are profound. A study done by the Domestic Violence Project of Ann Arbor, Michigan, found that virtually 100 percent of children who lived in violent homes exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Children from violent homes are six times more likely to attempt suicide and to abuse alcohol and drugs. Boys who grow up in violent homes are at great risk of becoming batterers, and girls are three times as likely to become battered women. And children of both sexes frequently express the belief that they will not live to become adults.

There were some early attempts to help battered women. Abolitionists, anti-vivisectionists, and civil right activists all made unsuccessful attempts to bring domestic violence to the public consciousness. However, it was not until the advent of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s that woman-battering began to be recognized as a social problem. Informal grassroots service providers emerged that have since evolved into the highly specialized multifaceted programs of emergency shelters, counseling centers, and adjunctive services that exist nationwide today.

Despite the existence of service providers, numerous barriers keep many battered women from seeking help. They may feel responsible for the violence and exhibit the learned helplessness that keeps them in abusive relationships. A woman also may be afraid that by asking for help she will lose the financial support of her abuser and be unable to provide for herself and her children. Rural women, or women living in very small towns or cities, may also be aware of the difficulty of keeping shelter or safe house locations secret and that "gossip" travels quickly in these communities. However, some resourceful rural programs have set up safety networks to help women escape their abusers.

BARRIERS TO SEEKING HELP BY JEWISH VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A distinctive combination of factors also may

inhibit, if not prevent, Jewish battered women from seeking services. Jewish condemnation of domestic violence can be traced back as far as the thirteenth century when Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg, Germany, wrote in a responsum, "One deserves greater punishment for striking his wife than for striking another person, for he is enjoined to respect her. Far be it from a Jew to do such a thing" (*Even haEzer*, 298). At the same time, the Jewish community has seemed reluctant to acknowledge the existence of domestic violence among Jews. Although Jewish women have always been at the vanguard of the battered women's movement, the community has been slow to confront the issue as a problem in Jewish families. Many Jewish battered women's advocates lament what they feel is collusion among their religious leaders to deny the very existence, much less the extent, of the violence within their communities.

The common assumption that all Jewish men are good husbands who provide well for their families and do not abuse substances, cheat, gamble, or hit their wives and children keeps Jewish women from seeking assistance. This myth is so powerful that when Jewish women are battered they readily assume responsibility for the abuse. Further, the tradition of *shalom bayit*, or keeping peace in the home, is seen as the responsibility of the Jewish wife. When this valued peace is shattered by violence, the woman suffers a deep sense of failure and shame.

Negative stereotypes about Jewish women also contribute to the reluctance of these victims to seek assistance. The belief that others consider a Jewish woman to be demanding, whining, overbearing, or a "princess" further reduces a victim's already diminished self-esteem and erodes her faith that she will be believed by counselors, law enforcement officers, or judges.

Institutional anti-Semitism may be another real barrier for Jewish battered women. In communities where there is no Jewish agency offering help, women may be confronted by shelter and counseling staff who have little or no understanding of the cultural issues that exist for Jewish women. For instance, Ortho-

dox or observant women may be expected to join in household or housekeeping duties on Friday nights or participate in group activities on the Sabbath. Christmas and Easter are celebrated with trees, decorations, and other symbols. Few shelters keep menorahs or other Jewish religious objects on hand or even ask Jewish women questions about their religious needs. Although some shelters make every effort to provide kosher dishes and foods, many are still either unaware or insensitive to these special needs in the mistaken belief that providing "safety" is enough.

At the same time, Jewish women face different risks in seeking help from a Jewish agency. Many, particularly those living in rural areas and small cities where, within the Jewish community, news travels fast, express the fear that the whole Jewish community will learn of their battering. The desire to protect the "good" name of their spouses, children, and extended families also contributes greatly to the reluctance of these women to come forward.

Finally, the deeply ingrained belief that as Jews they are obligated to "protect" the Jewish community by not releasing negative information that might be used against it contributes to the fear Jewish women have of disclosing the *shanda* of being battered by a Jewish man. Many Jewish women feel that by acknowledging the very existence of the abuse they are betraying the Jewish people and fueling anti-Semitism. As a result of some or all of these factors, it is estimated that Jewish women tend to stay in abusive relationships nearly twice as long as their gentile sisters—for eight to ten years.

NEEDS OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Battered women and their children have multiple needs. First and foremost, they need to be made safe. The woman who is still in the relationship needs a carefully thought-out plan of escape and a safe place to go, such as an emergency shelter. Since the most dangerous time for a woman is when she is attempting to exit the relationship, she must avoid places

where her abuser will almost certainly look for her: her place of employment, the children's school, and the homes of friends and family.

Women who have left the abusive relationship may need to file restraining orders; deal with custody, visitation, and other legal matters; find a safe place to live; and possibly find a job or government assistance.

Counseling is also imperative. Battered women must learn to set boundaries and exercise basic human rights such as saying "no" to unreasonable requests. Because frequent abuse erodes a woman's sense of self-worth, a battered woman must learn to value herself. Depression resulting from the inability to control the violence is almost always present, as are anxiety and fear caused by never knowing when and why violence will erupt. A battered woman must also be allowed to mourn the loss of the dreams she had for her relationship and be taught to break through the isolation imposed by the batterer and the feelings of shame and helplessness.

Children from violent homes witness abuse and live for years with anger, control, and intimidation. In addition, their developmental and emotional needs frequently are not attended to appropriately because of the mother's fear, depression, and helplessness and the father's rage. Children in violent homes are often depended upon inappropriately by a parent for support, nurturance, and validation, and unrealistic expectations to be good may be placed on them. Depression, aggression, and somatic complaints like headaches and stomachaches are the three most common areas of dysfunction for such children; behavioral manifestations include clinginess, violence toward people and property, lying and cheating, and disobedience at school.

METHODOLOGIES FOR WORKING WITH BATTERED WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

The highly specialized program services offered by battered women's centers are by far the safest and best choice for domestic violence victims. The needs of battered women

and their children require a multiplicity of specific clinical and adjunctive services that most individual practitioners are not equipped to offer. In addition, those who work with victims of domestic violence must be grounded in knowledge about the dynamics and realities of domestic violence, especially the enormous financial, legal, emotional, and safety challenges every victim faces when beginning to make decisions about changing her situation. Many general therapists have had little or no training in the provision of services to battered women and may even unknowingly contribute to continued victimization. For instance, seeing couples in conjoint therapy can present real physical danger to a battered woman if she discloses or discusses the abuse while the batterer is present. Conjoint couples counseling by its very nature assumes some balance of power between the partners that does not exist in battering relationships. If the therapist is unable to recognize the abuse and address those behaviors, the victim may see him or her as colluding with the batterer in his minimization and denial. This further isolates her and reinforces her learned helplessness.

Before clinical services are introduced, the concrete and safety needs of the victim must be addressed. Crisis intervention must provide the battered woman with immediate access to help. There exists a limited window of opportunity for outside intervention (usually after an acute battering incident) when the victim is receptive to help. This opportunity quickly evaporates when the batterer becomes repentant during the "honeymoon phase." Crisis lines provide immediate access to emergency shelters on a 24-hour basis. For example, Jewish Family Service's (JFS) Family Violence Project in Los Angeles maintains a 24-hour crisis line through which battered women not seeking shelter may obtain an appointment at our Community Counseling Center, usually within a day. This enables a "lethality" and needs assessment and begins to build positive momentum toward changing the situation.

Group counseling is particularly effective

as a primary or adjunctive form of therapy. The supportive atmosphere of the group allows the women to feel safe, express themselves, and receive positive feedback. Specific exercises and journal writing aid in the healing process. Most groups use cognitive behavioral theory, educating women while teaching them empowerment skills. Education is key. Depression and self-esteem can be dealt with by adding physical activities to the group, such as relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and guided imagery. Group therapy allows women to tell their stories. It breaks the wall of isolation and validates their experiences.

Short-term individual counseling may help a battered woman reduce stress and deal with depression. Battered women are also helped to develop healthy cognitive beliefs about themselves and to resolve feelings of loss connected to letting go of the relationship. Individual therapy is an excellent vehicle for the development of a positive self-image and self-esteem. Women may be encouraged to exercise and to participate in recreational activities. They are helped to increase awareness of negative self-statements through gentle confrontation and reframing, and they are encouraged to identify positive attributes. Journal writing is helpful in this process. Individual therapy encourages the battered woman to identify the good and bad in the relationship and to acknowledge its loss. It is important for a battered woman to receive encouragement and validation for the violence she has experienced. Important goals of the therapy are to help the woman reverse the learned helplessness, to promote her independence, and to show her that the counselor believes she is able to change and grow.

Treatment for children is provided in both group and individual sessions. Goals for therapy include breaking feelings of isolation and shame caused by living in a violent home; learning more effective means of coping with feelings of fear, sadness, and anger; learning communication and other skills for nonviolent conflict resolution; and alleviating the symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

Techniques used with children include behavioral therapy (which is especially effective with children aged 2 to 10), positive reinforcement, limit-setting, role-modeling, creative storytelling, puppetry, play therapy, clay, drawing, and the use of age-appropriate games.

THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PROJECT

The Family Violence Project of the Los Angeles JFS began in 1983 as a two-year pilot project. It was created after a study indicated that between 45 and 50 percent of the population served by the agency experienced some form of domestic violence. This violence cut across socioeconomic lines and was similar to what has been found in studies of other ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

The program, as it was developed and as it exists today, is based on a feminist philosophy of empowerment and is committed to serving the needs of all victims of domestic violence in a culturally sensitive manner. Its mission is to help victims of abusive families overcome the individual and interpersonal problems that have been the cause and the effect of domestic violence.

The original program offered community outreach and education, counseling, and support services to families, with an emphasis on the battered woman and her children. Over the years, with the help of various grants and volunteer assistance, additional services have been offered, including training, education, and staff development for the police department, City Attorney's office, courts, and community agencies; prevention education for high-school students; batterers' treatment groups; court accompaniment; translations of domestic violence educational materials into Hebrew, Farsi (the language of Iranian immigrants), and Russian; and outreach to the hearing-impaired community.

The Family Violence Project has expanded services dramatically in the last three years. In early 1994, one of the Project's volunteers donated funds to open a transitional house. That year, we opened Hope Cottage, the only long-term transitional shelter in the San

Fernando Valley, an area with a population of 1.8 million people. The shelter began in a small house where two families could stay rent-free for as long as six months, receiving supportive services from the project while they rebuilt their lives. Hope Cottage has since moved to a larger house and has obtained government funding for its purchase and renovation. When the renovation is complete, five families will be able to live there at any given time.

In September 1995, with funding from the State of California, Tamar House, a thirty-day emergency shelter, was opened. Tamar House is located in a quiet residential neighborhood and can accommodate up to seven families. It was furnished and equipped by generous donations from the community. The services provided in conjunction with the emergency shelter include a 24-hour crisis hotline, immediate intake and referral, advocacy, help with temporary restraining orders, court accompaniment, individual and group counseling, and parenting education for the mothers and specialized services for the children. Tamar House also maintains a kosher cupboard and can accommodate the needs of Orthodox families. Project staff work closely with JFS' Orthodox Counseling Program.

Staff of the Family Violence Project include licensed clinical social workers, paraprofessionals and a cadre of thirty volunteers. All staff and volunteers are required to complete a forty-hour State of California Office of Criminal Justice Planning domestic violence training program. With its combination of counseling center, emergency, and transitional shelters, the Family Violence Project is able to provide a continuum of services, helping families at every step in the process of rebuilding their lives.

We have been and remain deeply committed to providing services to battered Jewish women. We have spent much time and energy in outreach to Jewish organizations, ranging from sisterhoods to communal professional groups. Our goal is to make sure that all Jewish women who might be in need of help know about our program. We have partici-

pated in the authorship of *Shalom Bayit* (Russ et al., 1993), a publication that provides the national Jewish community with an understanding of domestic violence and child abuse as it relates to Jewish families.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Domestic violence programs exist nationwide, ranging from small grassroots networks to sophisticated, comprehensive programs. There are also many Jewish programs nationwide that offer a variety of services to battered women and their children. The range of services offered by these Jewish programs vary dramatically from state to state. Most programs are under the auspices of Jewish Family Service and are located in areas with large Jewish populations. JFS agencies that offer extensive programming in this area include JFCS, Minneapolis; JBFCs, New York; JFS of Atlantic County, New Jersey; JFS, San Francisco; JFS, Atlanta, and JFS, Detroit. In Canada, JF&CS of Toronto advertises its services to battered women and their children in separate brochures in English, Hebrew, and Russian. However, there exist almost no specifically Jewish programs in rural areas.

Specialized JFS programs range from a part-time staff person to full-service domestic violence programs that include counseling centers, emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs. There are several 24-hour crisis lines that can refer Jewish women to programs across the nation. Funding for sectarian programs is difficult to obtain and usually comes from individual donations and Jewish grant-making organizations. Funding for programs under the auspices of Jewish agencies that offer multicultural, nonsectarian services have had greater success in obtaining government and private foundation monies. The nonsectarian programs tend to be larger and to offer a wider range of services; they are usually located in large cities.

Domestic violence programs (as all social service programs) are chronically underfunded and unable to serve everyone in need. They are subject to the availability of funds, which can change dramatically from year to year. We opened Tamar House with a two-year grant from the State of California encouraging the establishment of new shelters. As the two years are coming to an end, funding may not continue at its present level, and we, along with other programs, will be seeking other forms of support for the program.

Staff members of Jewish agencies need to educate themselves about domestic violence as it exists in the Jewish community and to encourage their respective agencies to reach out to Jewish women experiencing violence. They need to build networks and relationships with domestic violence programs that can provide the full range of services that women and their children need. Agency staff should also offer to participate on multicultural panels and to offer in-service training to battered women's programs designed to sensitize them to the special needs of Jewish battered women.

Finally, to maximize the use of already existing service providers, Jewish agencies should consider the establishment of a national network. This network would greatly increase our ability to share programs and to make accessible quality comprehensive services for the women and children we are all committed to serve.

REFERENCES

- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Fact Sheet*. 1991.
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Newsletter*. 1995.
- Russ, Ian, et al. (1993). *Shalom bayit: A Jewish response to child abuse and domestic violence*. Los Angeles: Jewish Family Service.
- Walker, Lenore. (1979). *The battered woman*. New York: Harper & Row.

LEONARD'S LEGACY Innovative Ventures in Serving Jews with Disabilities

STEVE M. SOLOMON, MSW

Former Executive Director, Miriam Home and Services, Montreal, Quebec, Canada and currently Executive Director, Jewish Family Services of Central Maryland, Baltimore

with

RACHEL HOWARD, LCSW

Director of Residential and Support Services, Jewish Family Services of Central Maryland, Baltimore

LENNY LAZARUS, BSW

Coordinator of Socio-Professional Services, Miriam Home and Services, Montreal, Quebec, Canada and

WEBB F. SPRAETZ, MS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Developmental Disabilities Coordinator, Jewish Family Services of Atlanta, Georgia

Innovative and creative service strategies are needed to respond to an aging cohort of disabled adults at a time when public and Federation resources are severely limited. Such strategies should be guided by concepts of choice and inclusion.

Because this special issue of the *Journal* is commemorating twenty-five years of leadership by the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, we begin by recognizing the pioneering role that the AJFCA and its member agencies have played in initiating and supporting intellectual exchanges about services to people with disabilities among service providers of all sizes throughout North America. In February 1995, the four co-authors of this article met at a historic enclave sponsored by AJFCA entitled "Serving the Needs of the Developmentally Disabled: New Challenges for the Jewish Community." The first major conference of Jewish agency providers of service to the developmentally disabled in North America, it sought to address the full range of issues relating to serving Jews with special needs.

The keynote speaker and scholar-in-residence of the conference was Jack Yates, Director of Staff Development of the Southeast region of Massachusetts and a protege of Wolf Wolfensberger, a recognized leader in the field of serving persons with disabilities. During his presentation, Yates reflected on the death and life of an individual who was a

human being first and a person with a disability second. Mr. Yates recalled the rabbi who delivered the eulogy for "Leonard," a young, intellectually disabled man from Sharon, Massachusetts; the eulogy focused on Leonard's "contribution and dedication and on his calling to assert the rights of persons with disabilities into which he had been cast in his life." The rabbi spoke of Leonard's attendance at Sabbath services and his steady service to the Jewish Community Center and its activities, and he described Leonard not only as a good man but as a good Jew. Leonard's fidelity to his Jewishness, the rabbi said, was manifest in his service as an activist for justice. Mr. Yates asserted his belief that the essence of being a member of a "chosen people" is not that Jews may have been chosen by G-d, but that Jews have indeed been chosen by history to play roles of moral responsibility for justice and for community.

The fact that Leonard "had not lived to see the achievement of justice and community," he asserted, "did not diminish his contribution, and the fact that we may not live to see those achievements does not diminish the worth of his example to us. In the words of