# NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**OPDV Bulletin/Fall 2010** 

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Click <u>here</u> to help turn New York State purple and to learn more about Domestic Violence Awareness Month!

## **Media Coverage of Domestic Violence**

Media helps to shape public opinion. As such, the media has the potential to be a powerful tool in a community's response to domestic violence. Responsible and accurate reporting on domestic violence can help educate the public about the issue and make people aware of what help is available. On the other hand, inaccurate and irresponsible reporting can be dangerous, reinforcing myths that exist about domestic violence and negatively impacting victims.

A handful of organizations have created tool kits to help journalists enhance their coverage of domestic violence and to help advocates work with the media. One of these organizations is the <a href="Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)">Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)</a>. They have published a Handbook for Journalists and other materials about media coverage of domestic violence.

See page 3 for Questions and Answers with Chris Wilhite from RICADV about media coverage of domestic violence.

### Did you know...

There was a 21% increase in required\* orders of protection issued from 2008 and a 26% increase from 2007. Every court experienced an increase from 2008 to 2009 and from 2007 to 2009. (Office of Court Administration)

This statistic is taken from the 2009 NYS Domestic Violence Dashboard which compiles statistics related to domestic violence from many systems, such as law enforcement, public assistance, domestic violence services, and the courts. To see the entire document: <a href="https://www.opdv.state.ny.us/statistics/nydata/2009/nys2009data.pdf">www.opdv.state.ny.us/statistics/nydata/2009/nys2009data.pdf</a>.

\*These are orders of protection that are required to be recorded in the UCS' Domestic Violence Registry.

# From the Executive Director



As we enter our third year of Shining the Light on Domestic Violence by aiming to turn the state purple, we want to see what you do to highlight the month. A resource packet is available on our website, and we're reaching out through Facebook and Twitter to encourage you to let us know how you went purple. Get back to us, and help us shine the light on you too!

In this issue we highlight the recently updated curriculum we developed with the AIDS Institute on Domestic Violence in LGBT Communities. We also recently published an informational guide on LGBTQ intimate partner violence. Additionally, we released informational materials to colleges to help them comply with the new mandate that they inform incoming students about domestic violence and stalking.

Inside this Bulletin is a Q & A about media coverage of domestic violence - we have also published tip sheets to help advocates work with reporters, and to help reporters strengthen their coverage of this issue. Media helps shape the public's perception, so providing tools to help enhance this coverage is critical. Finally, our article examines the relationship between suicide and intimate partner violence. Given the high rate of suicide among young people, this article may unfortunately be an appropriate complement to our campus materials.

As we close out the year, thanks again for your hard work, and please continue to reach out to us with questions, requests, or suggestions.

Amy Barasch Executive Director

#### **Domestic Violence and Suicide**

#### Fred Meservey, Pat Breux, and Gary O'Brien, Suicide Prevention Center of New York State

Of the 34,000 Americans who lose their lives each year to suicide, all too often violence, including domestic violence, is woven through their lives. Women who experience intimate partner violence are 12 times more likely to end their lives by suicide than those who have not. And it is not just victims who are at risk; research indicates a two to five fold increase in suicidal behavior for children exposed to domestic violence. A growing body of research focuses on this link and offers us hope that better outcomes can be found.

#### Warning signs and implications for domestic violence providers

Most people with thoughts of suicide are ambivalent about death; a part of them wants to die, but a part of them wants to live. Suicide is the means they identify to escape searing emotional pain and they see no other way out. The American Association of Suicidology has developed a mnemonic to help identify the warning signs of suicide: IS PATH WARM? The letters represent:

- Ideation Substance abuse
- Purposelessness Anxiety Trapped Hopelessness
- Withdrawal Anger Recklessness and Mood change

A history of trauma presents a significant risk factor for suicide, which may be evidenced by the above warning signs. Counselors who see one or more of these signs should consider the possibility that the person may be having thoughts of suicide. However, the only way to know for sure is to ask. Thus, when screening victims, counselors should be alert to suicidal risk and ask directly if the victim is having thoughts of suicide and assess for potential risk. If the person is having thoughts of suicide, it must be taken seriously and the person should be referred to a suicide first aid resource like mobile crisis or an ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) trained helper, or if necessary, a mental health professional who can do a full assessment, including suicide assessment, and develop and carry out a treatment plan. If the risk of suicide attempt is imminent, they should call 911 for immediate assistance.

It is not always easy to determine whether a suicide threat is imminent, but the following four questions can guide such decisions.

- 1. Is the person having thoughts of suicide (ideation) determined by asking directly and openly? If yes,
- 2. Does the person have a plan for carrying out suicidal intentions? If yes,
- 3. Does the person have the means or access to the means to carry out his or her suicide plan (e.g., possession or access to a loaded firearm)? If yes,
- 4. Does the person have a timetable for carrying out the plan and is it immediate?

#### **CONSIDER...**

In addition to the increased risk of suicide faced by victims of domestic violence, another problem they face is that they are sometimes held hostage by the threat of suicide by the abuser. How do we sort out whether this is an empty threat designed to manipulate, an actual expression of imminent suicidality, or some mixture of both? Researchers at the University of Rochester are exploring this phenomenon by studying patterns of aggression. They believe that developing tools to better describe and understand these patterns will lead to better predictability about suicidal threats.1

1 Conner, Kenneth R., et al, Reactive Aggression and Suicide Theory and Evidence, Aggression and Violent Behavior. 2002;59:1-20.

#### Prevention is the key to intervention

Suicide, like domestic violence, is stigmatized; people avoid discussing having thoughts of suicide just as they avoid talking about being victims of abuse. Yet direct and open communication is critical to intervention. Public health strategies that change public perception, encourage screening, and provide training for community caregivers are approaches focused on prevention, and make intervention more acceptable and possible. For example, one of the largest suicide prevention studies ever undertaken was done in the 1990s by the US Air Force. They integrated suicide prevention policies throughout the entire force, including gatekeeper training and destigmatizing help-seeking. As a result, suicides decreased, and homicide and family violence rates decreased as well.

#### **Other Resources**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

American Association of Suicidology: <a href="https://www.Suicidology.org">www.Suicidology.org</a>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <a href="https://www.afsp.org">www.afsp.org</a>

QPR Institute: www.qprinstitute.com

#### Tools and training available

The Suicide Prevention Center of New York State offers community gatekeeper trainings that prepare helpers of all kinds to be alert to the possibility of suicide and respond effectively. Trainings range from a one hour training on how to identify warning signs and refer someone for help, to a two-day intensive training to prepare caregivers to intervene to prevent the immediate risk of suicide. To learn more or to find a trainer near you, visit: www.preventsuicideNY.org

<sup>1</sup> Dube, Shanta R., et al, Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide Throughout the Life Span; JAMA 2001;286:3089-3096. <a href="http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/286/24/3089">http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/286/24/3089</a>

## **Q&A About Media Coverage of Domestic Violence**



This Q&A was conducted with Chris Wilhite, Director of Development and Public Relations, Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Q: What are some typical areas of concern

## seen in the media's coverage of violence against women?

A: The unfortunate trend is that violence against women is often portrayed as a personal story in which somehow the relationship went sour. Reporters will interview neighbors, coworkers, and relatives but do not get the perspective of domestic violence professionals, survivors, or even the police. Sometimes the term "domestic violence" will be omitted from the coverage, even though the story being reported clearly falls within the legal definition. Finally, unless the reporter and editorial staff are educated about domestic violence, dynamics such as the abuser's use of manipulation and control are absent from the coverage. For these reasons, it is critical that advocates maintain a close relationship with journalists.

## What are some ways media professionals can strengthen their coverage of violence against women?

A: In 2000, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence issued guidelines for journalists who cover domestic violence. Some of the guidelines include:

- Use of the words, "domestic violence" when speaking about violence between intimate partners.
- Ask the police whether crime fits legal definition. [Editor's note: While many states have a crime of "domestic violence," New York State does not. Ask if the parties were in an "intimate relationship" as defined by New York law.]

- Avoid quoting bystanders, such as neighbors and community members, who, lacking real information, reinforce popular myths about domestic violence.
- Prioritize interviews with survivors, advocates, police, and other domestic violence experts who can put individual acts of domestic violence into context of larger trends.

## What things should domestic violence service providers keep in mind when talking to the media?

Reporters are often very busy. It is important to respect their time. So, the first thing you should ask if you are calling them is if they are on deadline and do they have a minute to talk. If you don't know the answer to a question they ask you, do not answer it. Just politely say that you will call them back with an answer. Then do some research and call them back with an answer or with an alternate source who might have the answer.

## Q: How can a local domestic violence program or coalition develop and/or improve relationships with local media?

A: First of all, don't wait for them to call you - build relationships with journalists. Monitor the news to see who covers domestic violence. Call reporters who are likely to cover your story – don't give up if the first call doesn't produce a story. Help the reporter by providing background materials. The key is that your job is to make the journalists' jobs easier. If you are providing them with a news story, make sure it's news: use the three C's. Is it current? Is there conflict? Is it controversial? Journalists will begin to rely on your agency as a primary source if you are:

 Accessible – can journalists access your organization after hours? On weekends?

- Reliable when you say you are going to send them background, do it. If you say you will call them back in 5 minutes, do it.
- Helpful send background, make calls for them to your speakers, research things if needed.
- Timely if a murder happened last night, don't wait to the end of the day to call.
- Honest if you don't know something, say so.
- Credible know your facts, give the real deal.

## What tools are available to assist the media in covering violence against women?

A: One way to build a strong relationship with a reporter is to find out what their opinions of domestic violence are; what roadblocks they face when covering domestic violence; if they've had training on domestic violence; etc. Once you get to know them, you can begin to offer information, such as appropriate articles in leading domestic violence journals, listings of trainings on domestic violence, copies of the legal statutes that define domestic violence in your state or community, and any of your agency's public information materials. Most importantly, the best tool is maintaining a relationship with media professionals.

Note: OPDV recently developed materials related to media coverage of domestic violence, which are available on our website. There are also links to many resources for journalists on covering domestic violence and for domestic violence advocates on working with the media. Visit: http://www.opdv.state.ny.us/public awareness/media/index.html

### **Legislative Update**

The Governor signed into law several bills that have the potential to significantly impact domestic violence victims. Chapter 405 http://www.assembly. state.ny.us/leg/?default\_fld=%0D %0A&bn=S06987%09%09&Text=Y created Article 121 in the Penal Law, titled "Strangulation and Related Offenses." In the past, the act of strangulation was rarely recognized as a serious offense, unless it resulted in death. The new law acknowledges that near-asphyxiation, which may or may not leave visible marks, must be prosecuted as a serious crime. The new law established three new crimes: Criminal Obstruction of Breathing or Blood Circulation (A misdemeanor), Strangulation in the Second Degree (D violent felony), and Strangulation in the First Degree (C violent felony). all have been designated family offenses. Three bills that should result in fairer, more equitable divorce settlements were also signed into law. The new "no-fault" divorce law http:// www.assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default fld=&bn=S03890%09%09&Text=Y will allow spouses to divorce on the grounds that the relationship has irretrievably broken down for at least six months, as long as the issues of marital property distribution, spousal or child support, child custody and visitation, and counsel's fees have been resolved by the parties or the court. The second law <a href="http://www.">http://www.</a> assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default\_fld= %0D%0A&bn=a10984%09%09&Text=Y will require courts to assess the respective incomes of divorcing parties and award temporary maintenance, determined by an

established formula and set of factors, to the less moneyed spouse. The third law http://www. assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default\_fld= %0D%0A&bn=a07569%09%09&Text=Y establishes a presumption that the less moneyed spouse is entitled to payment of counsel and expert witness fees and requires the parties to submit financial information to the court to determine payment by the other spouse\*. These new laws will offer the legal protections and the economic security that is necessary for domestic violence victims to live free from/of abusive marriages.

\*This law was amended to change the effective date.

A summary of additional 2010 domestic violence related laws is available on OPDV's website.

### **OPDV Distributes Model Guidelines to College Campuses**

NYS Education Law was amended to require all colleges in New York State to provide incoming students with information about domestic violence the guidance already provided about sexual assault. To assist colleges in meeting this mandate, OPDV has created a resource packet called Model Implementation Guidelines for Revision to Education Law: Addressing Domestic *Violence and Stalking on Campus.* This packet of information has recently been distributed to every college in New York State.

The Guidelines contain helpful information for colleges to use when

As of April 7, 2009, section 6432 of the implementing their response to domestic violence and stalking on campus. The Guidelines include information on convening a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Campus Security (every college already and stalking prevention, in addition to has one of these Advisory Committees in place), providing education and training to students and staff, reporting and responding to domestic violence and stalking on campus, and specific information that must be provided to incoming students. Included in the Guidelines are links to checklists and best practices that colleges can use while developing their policies. In addition to the Guidelines, OPDV is available to provide training to campus security personnel.

OPDV hopes that the Guidelines will help

colleges to incorporate the revisions into their practice easily and effectively, and we encourage colleges to call on us for assistance in meeting their mandate. For more information about domestic violence and stalking on campus, go to: http://www. opdv.state.ny.us/professionals/campus/ index.html



### **LGBT Curriculum Update**

In 2001, OPDV and the SUNY Professional Development Program (PDP) developed a day-long training on Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Communities, for use by the NYS Department of Health AIDS Institute. The purpose of the training curriculum was to give health and human service providers the knowledge and skills necessary to sensitively and effectively respond to LGBT victims of domestic violence.

Recently, the curriculum has been significantly revised and updated. The new version reflects changes in New York State laws since 2001, changes in thinking in the LGBT community, and feedback from trainers who use the curriculum and members of the LGBT Domestic Violence Network.

The curriculum is available online at VAWnet: <a href="http://www.vawnet.org/category/">http://www.vawnet.org/category/</a> Documents.php?docid=859&category id=597.

VAWnet tells us that the manual has consis-

tently been among their most accessed files since it was first posted in 2001, which we believe reflects human service providers' growing interest in obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary to serve LGBT victims.

This training is provided by the AIDS Institute. Information about where this training will be offered within New York State is available on the AIDS Institute training calendar: <a href="http://www.health.state.">http://www.health.state.</a> ny.us/diseases/aids/training/nonclinical.

NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence www.opdv.state.ny.us

Please send any comments or content ideas to: opdvbulletin@opdv.state.ny.us

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