

Abuse Centers Don't Help Men

*Special Fathers Day 1998 statement by Philip Cook
Author of "Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence"*

"I spent hours calling, saying 'This is what happened. The police refuse to take a report. I need a restraining order. How can I get her arrested?' They said, 'Well, we don't know what to say to a man.' Or, 'Well, we just help women.'"

Stanley Green's experience is typical of men physically abused by their wives who attempt to call domestic violence shelters. Green says he suffered years of abuse and finally decided to seek help after a beating in a car. While he was in his seat belt, his wife allegedly used a cell phone to hit him and then jumped on him and kicked him, resulting in a fractured rib and numerous other injuries. Most abused men however, don't bother calling shelters or domestic violence crisis lines because they rightly assume they won't get help. If they knew that domestic violence shelters and crisis lines would not discriminate and treat men fairly, they would call. Minister Joe Cogan, after police allegedly failed to arrest his wife for throwing a knife at him and cutting him the shoulder, says he "very definitely" would have called such a service: "It seems as though I had no one to really turn to. To say, you know, 'How can I cope with this?' I felt as though I was out in a boat in the ocean all by myself. I saw so many opportunities for help for women in my situation. I don't deny them that opportunity, but the other side is, I felt I had been an abused husband, and an abused parent, with really nowhere to turn."

Green sums up the situation facing male victims of domestic violence: "I don't know of any state in the nation where it's legal for an agency that accepts government funds to discriminate on the basis of sex. Maybe you could argue for a separate but equal basis, though that's a very tenuous argument, too. How can a feminist, or anyone, argue for sex discrimination? Yet that's exactly what's going on in shelters and crisis lines across the country."

Opponents of gender neutral services or language say it is too difficult to provide services for both sexes, but in fact, there are a few shelters like the Valley Oasis Crisis Center in Lancaster, California that easily accommodate both genders without conflict. In Charlottesville, Virginia and Kelso, Washington for example, gender neutral crisis lines do not provide on site shelter, but do help arrange transitional housing and discount hotel rooms, as well as provide traditional counseling, court advocacy and some support groups. Any existing shelter or crisis line could help males with these types of services, but discrimination and

often outright hostility towards the male victim is the norm.

When Erin Pizzey opened the world's first shelter for battered women in 1972, and wrote the first modern book on domestic violence, "Scream Quietly, or the Neighbors Will Hear" in 1974, government, police, and the news media predicted that her shelter would stand empty. No one would come, because these women were so few in number and were being adequately served by existing institutions. Pizzey's shelter of course, and others that followed were soon filled to overflowing. The same situation exists for men today, with the important difference that an even larger entrenched structure has successfully denied services to victims. Pizzey herself understands this: "For the last twenty-five years, a powerful women's movement, has managed to silence anyone who dare question their mis-appropriation of funds and their refusal to accept that millions of men have been denied their legal rights."

The Federal Violence Against Women Act with its emphasis on providing large amounts of taxpayer dollars for women-only domestic violence services aids the current sex discrimination and denial of services. In fact, funds are being used not only to discriminate in provision of services, but also to promote the idea that men don't need the services! It is also quite plainly, a violation of the 14th. amendment's equal protection clause.

Even with over forty published studies, (many funded by government arms like the National Institute of Mental Health), conclusively proving that domestic violence has a large number of male victims, and the same sources used in government hearings to show the incidence of female victims, there are few politicians courageous enough to vote against the VAWA act, or even give its funding criteria the kind of scrutiny routinely given to other programs. The unprecedented government legalized and richly funded sex discrimination continues. Erin Pizzey says it should come as no surprise: "Most of the shelters aren't there to help women come to terms with what is happening in their lives. They are there to fund their conferences and their statements against men."

This may be a bit of an overstatement on Pizzey's part (but then her home was shot at by advocates who wanted to silence her) as there are many shelters that do care and provide excellent services for women victims. However, anyone who wants to change things faces an uphill battle, as Janis Dimmitt the Executive Director of the Kelso, Washington Emergency Shelter explains: "The road to enlightenment has been a rocky one. We are looked upon as being friends of the perpetrators rather than friends of the victims, because all males are supposed to be evil and bad. This attitude prevails in many shelters."

According to reports from thousands of women in violent relationships current government policy and services are based on only half the truth, as they report that half the time they hit first, and a quarter of the time, only they were violent.

If Pizzey and others are right, powerful forces are intent in keeping the the truth about domestic violence hidden. It will take attorneys and politicians with uncommon courage willing to challenge these forces in order to establish fair and equitable programs that will in the end provide more meaningful results in the battle against domestic violence for women, children, and men.

Philip W. Cook is the author of Abused Men-The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence (Praeger). He frequently lectures on the subject around the U.S. and has appeared on "Sally," the "Crier Report, " "MSNBC" and other nationally broadcast programs. He can be contacted at PO Box 951 Tualatin, OR 97062. or through the web site at: www.abusedmen.com .