

Washington State National Organization for Women

Equal Protection Under the Law Violence Against Women

Washington State NOW supports efforts to end violence against women in the areas of sexual assault and domestic violence and has endorsed the efforts of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs and the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. NOW also recognizes the disruptive and dangerous nature of stalking and supports efforts to deal effectively with the problem. Violence against women and children is an enormous problem in our country and in our state. Statistically, most women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime.

Domestic Violence

According to FBI statistics, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women, causing more injuries than muggings, stranger rape and car accidents combined. Over 4,000 victims of domestic violence are killed every year. Domestic violence causes almost 100,000 days of hospitalization 30,000 emergency room visits and 40,000 trips to a doctor every year. In Washington State there are between 48,000 and 50,000 domestic violence assaults every year that result in serious injuries. About 17% of pregnant women report having been battered, often with serious, sometimes with life-threatening results.

Children are also victims of domestic violence. They suffer both physical and psychological damage. Often the physical damage is caused when children try to protect their mothers. Children often need help to deal with the traumas they face as a result of domestic violence.

In 1997, one of every 25 children in the State of Washington was referred to Child Protective Services for alleged child abuse and neglect. Children who witness violence at home are five times more likely to commit or suffer violence when they become adults.

Between 50 and 60 domestic violence related deaths occur, over 19% of these are children. In 1997, in Washington State, 15 of 52 deaths were children: 28%; in 1998, 9 of 47 deaths were children: 19%.

Women who are attempting to escape the cycle of violence face a number of barriers. It is common for abusive partners to feel threatened by a woman's efforts to gain job skills that will allow her independence and self-esteem. Their sabotage can take many forms such as failing to provide needed childcare or by making harassing visits to classrooms and job sites. Women have been fired from their jobs where abusive partners have harassed them. Other women have quit their jobs in order to protect themselves and their children. Many women and children move, sometimes out of state to obtain safety. Additionally, their safety or security is sometimes compromised by lack of confidentiality between them and domestic violence victim advocates.

Children also suffer the traumas that result from domestic violence situations as well as the other disruptions to their lives that result. Help is not always available to them or not readily available.

Sexual Assault

The numbers of sexual assaults that occur each year are hard to determine. Conservative estimates are that only 10% of actual cases are ever reported. There are 310,000 rapes reported annually through the National Crime Victims Office. The implications for the actual occurrence of rape are overwhelming. More than half these women knew their attackers. Last year, sexual assault programs in Washington State served over 9,100 victims of sexual assault and abuse, including 5,600 children. They responded to over 16,700 crisis calls. They also provided information and referral to 20,200 individuals.

Unfortunately, funding is inadequate to meet the needs of all victims.

continued on back

Stalking

There seem to be no statistics readily available about stalking, but it continues to be a frightening and potentially dangerous phenomenon. We recognize it here because legislation to protect victims is important to women and children. They are sometimes forced to relocate or in other ways disrupt their lives and their work.

Washington State NOW supports equal protection under the law for all of our citizens, including women and children. Washington State NOW will be following legislation during the 2000 legislative session to accomplish the following:

- ✎ Modify Washington State's unemployment laws to allow claimants to qualify for unemployment when they:
 - * quit a job because of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking
 - * are getting psychological counseling, are actively pursuing legal protection, or are going into hiding or relocating for the same reasons.
- ✎ Include in the modification language which would allow unemployment claimants receive a waiver for an appropriate time (up to 12 weeks) of the job search requirement in instances when they would be unable to secure their safety or relocate without a waiver.
- ✎ Pass legislation that provides privileged communication between domestic violence victim advocates and victims similar to what is already in the Statute for sexual assault victims
- ✎ Support modification to the Domestic Violence and Stalking laws as they apply to Protection and Anti-Harassment orders to:
 - * clarify in the statute that judges may prohibit the person whom the order is in effect on from coming within 100 feet of the victim – the so-called “bubble standard”
 - * eliminate the practice of automatically voiding an order when the perpetrator is released from prison and
 - * ensure in a domestic violence situation that when a protection order is broken, the violent act and the breaking of the order are charged as two separate crimes rather than being rolled into one charge.
- ✎ Support use of surplus Welfare Reform funds to provide services for children who are in or have been in domestic violence situations and need help.
- ✎ Support the Sexual Assault Programs' request for additional funding