

Violence Against Women Act: The Fast Food of Law

By Terri Lynn Tersak

As I reflect on my own experiences with domestic violence and the pretense of help our abuse system claims to offer, I find myself feeling most sorry for today's victims. As the years pass, our domestic violence systems under the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#) offer less and less help to the most severely battered, but ever increasing rewards for those who operate the systems.



I encounter a frightening number of victims of severe battery with the same story to tell; they went through the courts and things got worse for them, almost immediately. I have experienced this myself, personally. An expansive annotated list of government and academic studies supporting these concerns is in the article "[Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#)" by Richard L. Davis.

For the past twelve years, the American taxpayers have supported VAWA and other domestic violence programs, which have grown to the tune of \$1 billion a year. Why do we not only keep such a failure operating, but also expand its influences and funding year after year?

I believe it follows the same logic as our society's affinity for fast food -- instant gratification. It is quick, easy to get and satisfies an immediate personal desire. However, that satisfaction is hollow and short lived, and often creates unintended, unexpected problems for the consumer.

Meanwhile the sellers make a fortune selling their ineffective and often harmful product. In order to keep the money rolling in, they must actively promote it to keep people accepting it, wanting it, and believing it is a good thing for everyone, regardless of the facts.

To these ends, each year we dedicate a month to promote everything the [Violence Against Women Act](#) pretends to bring us, under the guise of protecting women from abuse and providing service to those that have suffered it.

Prior to the July 19, 2005 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing for the reauthorization of VAWA, many people, including myself, tried to tell our side about the failures of VAWA. Several scientists with decades of experience studying the dynamics of intimate partner violence also requested to testify at this hearing. However, even after running [full-page ads](#) in the Washington D.C. based newspapers expressing our concerns, we were all denied time to speak at the hearing.

Who did testify? A retired NBA basketball legend, a movie star, and a vice president of a cosmetics company. If these are qualifications the U.S. Senate considers appropriate for someone to testify as an expert on the subject matter of VAWA, whom would they invite to testify about violence on prime time TV? A few Tibetan monks perhaps?

So what went wrong?

Any system polluted with ideological propaganda, whose operation is rife with fraud and real victims are nothing more than marketing tools is destined to failure. Unless, what it perceived as a failure was the intended, designed result.

If misery does love company, then maybe the one success of VAWA has been to make sure victims of extreme domestic brutalities have plenty of company.

The women of [True Equality Network](#), most of who are themselves victims of severe domestic violence, have spent almost five years in the courthouses [interviewing over 15,000 plaintiffs](#) in domestic violence cases just before they entered the courtroom. The overwhelming number of those interviewed did not attempt to mask the real reasons they filed a domestic violence claim: control, money, and revenge -- for everything you could possibly imagine -- everything except acts of domestic violence.

Subsequently, True Equality Network asked prominent members of the counties in which the plaintiff surveys were conducted to interview the judges who heard these cases. Every single one of the judges interviewed corroborated the study's findings of pervasive levels of false claims of domestic violence in their court.

These judges also state they know that the attorneys in these cases -- including [Legal Services Corporation Grantees](#) -- are suborning perjury by scripting the statements of the women in these cases. Moreover, they expressed concern that their District Attorneys were not prosecuting these acts of fraud.

Renowned professors and scientists who have reviewed this study series have said that the study was conducted using proper scientific methods and has produced "*...significant findings that need to be widely published and cited.*" Among those supporting this study is Dr. Don Dutton of the University of British Columbia, who is planning to duplicate this study in the Canadian court system.

Along with Dr. Dutton, numerous civil rights organizations requested True Equality Network to produce a training manual for conducting this study. With this tool, interviews of domestic violence plaintiffs are now being conducted in all 50 US states and starting soon in Canada.

Our [abuse shelter investigation](#) has discovered some disturbing activities. This includes shelters operating prostitution services, drug dealing, sheriff's deputies working as "pimps," and shelter staffers arranging to have the shelter clients provide sexual favors to law enforcement officers in exchange for the officers' false testimony in court.

The existing system must be solving some concern or no one would support it. Then whom does it help and in what ways?

It is well known and reported that false allegations of domestic violence have long been the tactical weapon of choice to gain advantage in contested custody cases. This provides financial rewards not just to the women, but also to the states through a vast array of federal funding sources. Many of these sources have nothing to do with domestic violence, such as increased incentives from federal child support collection funding, TANF, HUD, and many others, giving the states as much incentive to perpetuate the fraud as those that are actually perpetrating it.

Two special reports from [RADAR](#) - Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Abuse Reporting, are worthwhile reading: "[Perverse Incentives, False Allegations, and Forgotten Children](#)" outlines the monetary motivators for filing false allegations of domestic violence and "[An Epidemic of Civil Rights Abuses: Ranking of States' Domestic Violence Laws](#)" covers which states provide the greatest incentives for perpetrating these acts of fraud.

The bottom line is: our abuse support system seems to be supporting everyone, except the severely abused. We are nothing more than media fodder used to foster sufficient public guilt to keep the fraud funded. By parading photos of our battered bodies before the public and Congress the domestic violence coalitions can keep the pork barrel full.

It doesn't take a scholar to realize that if the beatings decrease so may the funding. This makes us acceptable and maybe even necessary losses.

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