

VAWA Fails to Protect Women Who Need Protection the Most

By Terri Lynn Tersak

Jane Williamson (not her real name) suffered repeated blows to her head. She went to an abuse shelter and complained about ringing in her right ear and blurred vision in her eye. The shelter staff was unable to detect any visible signs of her partner's assault. They told her the symptoms would soon clear up, then sent her off to see a psychiatrist.



Within a few days Jane became deaf in that ear and blind in one eye. She will never recover her senses. Her attacker never saw a single minute in jail, nor did he pay a cent toward her medical bills.

Sadly, cases like this are common. Indeed, the majority of the 10,000 women who work with the [True Equality Network](#) have been in Jane Williamson's shoes themselves – beaten and forgotten. These women recount an eerily similar story. When they try to work through the courts, things actually get worse for them. Many of these women believe you are better off leaving town and changing your name, than dialing 911.

American taxpayers support the Violence Against Women Act and other domestic violence programs to the tune of \$1 billion a year. So what's gone wrong?

First, abuse shelters, operating under the guise of protecting victim confidentiality and thus unaccountable to the American taxpayer, have become more concerned about generating revenue than serving true victims. Shelters are constantly looking for ways to increase their caseload. So if they have open beds, they often will admit a woman who simply claims to be "battered" – no questions asked.

In recent months, True Equality Network has been conducting an investigation of abuse shelters in 21 states. This investigation involves the woman going to a shelter saying she needs help. In most states, policies permit women to stay in a shelter for 72 hours without filing a formal complaint of abuse.

Our investigation has uncovered a broad range of illegal operations, including shelters involved in drug dealing and call-girl services. In one state, our investigator made an anonymous tip to the local law enforcement agency, resulting in the arrest of two Sheriff Deputies working as "pimps" for a prostitution service.

In another case, shelter staffers were observed arranging for shelter clients to provide sexual favors to law enforcement officers in exchange for their false testimony in court.

Second, our domestic violence system has become flooded with trivial and false claims of abuse. Remember David Letterman who was hit with a restraining order last year because he allegedly sent mental telepathic messages to a woman in New Mexico he had never heard of? Those claims are making it impossible for the voices of true victims to be heard.

[RADAR](#) – Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Abuse Reporting -- has recently released two reports that illuminate the problem. First, most statutory definitions of abuse are so broad that almost any action now qualifies as "violence." [<http://www.mediadar.org/docs/Vanishing-Rule-of-Law.pdf>] Second, states have created a broad range of monetary and other perverse incentives for unscrupulous women who wish to play the abuse card. [<http://www.mediadar.org/docs/Perverse-Incentives.pdf>]

Over the past 5 years, True Equality Network members interviewed over 15,000 women in 17 states at courthouses who were seeking domestic restraining orders. In the great majority of cases, these women were not suffering from true violence.

The judges who heard these cases were interviewed and corroborated that these women's claims were false. These judges stated they knew that the attorneys were actually scripting the women's statements, an offense legally known as suborning perjury.

And why would the ladies make false allegations?

Fake allegations of violence are known to be the tactical weapon of choice to gain advantage in contested custody cases. Divorce attorneys call them silver bullets, slam-dunks, or just "divorce planning," thus entitling the woman to many years of tax-free child support money.

Persons who claim to be abuse victims are also entitled to a vast range of social services, including low-cost housing courtesy of HUD and welfare payments from TANF. These programs are subsidized by the federal government, so the states have as much incentive to continue the fraud as the women who are initiating it.

Persons who file trivial claims of domestic violence are accorded equal standing by the abuse shelters and courts as the most seriously battered women. In a system rife with fraudulent claims, it is easy to understand why the Jane Williamsons of the world are being silenced.

As I reflect on my own experiences as a survivor of domestic violence and the deceptive pretense of help our abuse system offers, it has become clear that the abuse shelters, law enforcement personnel, and social welfare programs are profiting handsomely.

And what about the severely abused? They have been abandoned.

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