

Men are also victims of cruel domestic abuse

By HARRY CROUCH

I strongly support Sen. Dede Alpert's effort to help "women and children" victims of domestic abuse disguise their whereabouts to avoid would-be abusers (Village News, March 26, 1998, p. 7, "Taking the next steps in the war against domestic violence").

However, her concern is flawed and based on erroneous gender beliefs which perpetuate schism between the sexes, furthering the abuse dilemma. That is, only women and children need protection. Worse, such flawed reasoning causes harm to children by misleading them and creating false senses of fear and security. Last, it fails to recognize men as survivors of abuse and women as unprovoked perpetrators.

It is absolute myth that more men are abusive than women. Over the past 20 years, study after study in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States shows that (1) men are more likely to be seriously injured in domestic disputes than female partners, (2) women are more likely to initiate unprovoked domestic violence against male partners, (3) children are more likely to survive abusive males than females and (4) women seriously abuse children with much greater frequency than men.

Michelle Elliot, director of Great Britain's Kidscape, recounts that survivors of sexual assault by both males and females "always" tell her that it was more traumatic

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to be sexually abused by the woman: "... cruelty that is almost unimaginable." Authors of the 1980 landmark study "Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family" received death threats from radical feminists after reporting that men are slightly more likely to be victims of domestic violence and mothers are more likely to be child abusers. On top-rated "Jerry Springer," women attack women, women attack men, men attack men, but men rarely attack women. Interestingly, in last year's "Million Man March," hundreds of thousands of men kissed the ground in prayer with concern for wives, children and family. The afterthought women's march was about women, solidarity and power.

We need to do a few things besides hiding identities. Related articles, speeches and legislation must be gender neutral using terms such as "people of abuse," "survivors of abuse" or "we the abused." Labels like "women and children of abuse" exacerbate the problem, pitting gender against gender and child against parent.

Money needs to be spent for gender-neutral community awareness and school programs. Eight-year-old Johnny goes home after school awareness training about "women and children" of abuse to an alcoholic mother who beats him. What inappropriate behaviors and defense mechanisms will he carry as weapons into the future? Will there be an "abuse excuse"

for him? The general public, support organizations, law enforcement agencies, health organizations, medical professionals, treatment providers and politicians need an enlightened lexicon and attitude; or we'll jail Johnny when he's older while his mother sips martinis by the pool.

In most domestic violence cases, substance abuse is incidental. Alleged perpetrators of domestic violence must be screened for alcohol and other illicit substances prior to being treated for violent behavior. To do otherwise is an absolute waste of resources and stupid. Addicts, particularly alcoholics, can't be reasoned with until several months of being sober and clean. According to certified domestic violence counselor Patrick Keith, no coherent policy exists to test and refer batterers for drugs and alcohol dependency in San Diego.

Men need programs for men. Not designed and operated-by-women-court-ordered-for-men-only-anger-management-programs, but designed and operated by men and women programs offering services women now get, i.e., free counseling, support services, advocates and shelters. You won't find any related men's programs in United Way's directory of community resources for San Diego. There are a few programs for women which offer more "afterthought" services to men, but only because such services help women.

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federal government appropriated about one billion dollars for related women's programs and not one cent for men's programs. Clinton's Violence Against Women Act made it easier for women to abuse and men to go to jail. The National Victim Center, when asked for materials about programs for male survivors of female abuse, responded, "... our library doesn't have any publications on that subject." A worker at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, when asked for any similar program in the United States, said, "There's nothing specifically tailored for that."

A few years ago, I met with Alaska Director for the Council on Domestic Violence and Abuse eliciting funds to establish programs for male victims of domestic violence. My response: "It will be a cold day in hell before I or anyone else in state government helps appropriate money for men's programs." Her reasoning: (1) women had worked hard for what money they had for domestic violence programs and were not about to share it, (2) only men are perpetrators and only women and children are victims, and (3) she, (like many other women

who staff and operate women programs) was a product of an abusive marriage in which she claimed to be the victim. Such irrational attitudes are prevalent in many people of power and influence. We need to educate them; or ask them to find other work. They do great harm.

I for one will no longer vote for any candidate who perpetuates gender hate and schism, even innocently. There are millions of voters like me who know men are getting the bum's rush by Ken Starr-tactic women's rights organizations and self-perpetuating, women-issue-oriented public commissions, perhaps like San Diego's Domestic Violence Council.

Publicly recognizing truths above and using gender neutral terms will cause a reduction in domestic violence and allow healing between genders. It will also generate votes. Smart politicians need to recognize this and take advantage of the moment. The radical feminist movement, like Bella, is passing into a more reasoned world. Our wounds cannot heal while rubbing in the salt of discontent and ignorant predispositions. Men bleed, too. The blaming needs to stop. I hope Ms. Alpert's legislation is gender neutral and protects us all.

Harry A. Crouch ran his own vocational-rehabilitation company, CASE Management Systems, in Anchorage, Alaska, providing job services for hard-to-serve groups such as felons & addicts.