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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY  
ON SPOUSE ABUSE  
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by  
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on Family Violence

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# ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SPOUSE ABUSE

The problems variously included under the terms "spouse abuse," "wife abuse," and "battered women" gained public prominence and increased attention from researchers and other professionals during the last half of the nineteen seventies. Each year a growing number of studies have addressed the probing questions that challenge all those concerned with family violence. The following bibliography highlights some publications that provide a general introduction to the topic of spouse abuse.

Barkas, J. Victims. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978.

Victims is a compilation of first-hand accounts by people who have been brutally victimized. Motivated by the killing of her brother by would-be robbers, Barkas has written the book to allow the victims to tell their stories of the crimes that either were perpetrated directly against them or affected them because of their close association with a victim. Many of the victims in Barkas' case studies are battered or murdered women, and a common theme in each chapter is the victimization of women at the hands of husbands, lovers, strangers, and institutions geared to protect citizens.

For programs that train volunteers to work in victim-oriented services, the book can serve as an orientation because it provides an invaluable perspective on the feelings and fears of victims. For professions working with victims, Victims can increase understanding of the issues and clarify the areas where further advocacy is needed. Barkas weaves into every chapter an issue which she does not resolve but rather leaves for the reader to ponder. It is a question that has been debated for centuries in philosophy books and is resurfacing in modern debate: Has the criminal justice system gone too far in protecting offenders' rights, thereby failing to protect victims' rights or to deter violent criminal acts?

Availability: Issues That Matter, P.O. Box 1419, FDR Station, N.Y. 10022. (\$10.95 or if ordered on business stationery, \$7.75.)

Chapman, Jane R.; Gates, Margaret J.; The Victimization of Women. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1978. (\$7.95).

This volume consists of chapters from 11 contributors, each dealing with a different aspect of the victimization of women. The introduction by Margaret Gates draws on the writings of authors as diverse as John Stuart Mill and Kate Millett to discuss the relationships between violence, sex, and power. Her theoretical piece sets the stage for the other chapters, which define specific victimization problems and suggest programs to address them.

Feminist author Del Martin gives a general exposition of the problems of battered women. Psychologist Lenore Walker deals with the use of shelters, medical services, law enforcement, and psychotherapy in these cases. Kee McFarlane, of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, writes about the sexual abuse of children, and Donna Schram, former Acting Director of the Washington State Criminal Justice Commission, summarizes what is known about the rape victim and offender and discusses recent changes in the rape laws.

The men who commit violent crimes against women are discussed by Judith V. Becker and Gene S. Abel, who studied the psychological attitudes of such offenders under a grant from the Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape. Jane Chapman considers the economic effect of female victimization, and Katherine Saltzman, Director of the York Street Center in Denver, has provided the concluding chapter on "women and victimization: the aftermath."

Eisenberg, Susan E.; Micklow, Patricia; "The Assaulted Wife: 'Catch-22' Revisited." Women's Right's Law Reporter, 3-4. Rutgers: State University of New Jersey, 1979.

This article reports a study of 20 wife assault cases in Michigan and focuses particularly on the historical, psychological, cultural, legal, and social forces involved. Although the authors discuss Michigan law in their overview of the legal issues concerning wife assault, the scope of their study is as broad as the problem itself. (Since the publication of their study, more comprehensive domestic violence legislation has been passed by the Michigan legislature.) While the study excludes statistical analyses, it relates incidents of spousal violence, discusses the limited response of the criminal justice system, and describes the cultural environment that nurtures violent behavior.

In a particularly noteworthy section, Eisenberg and Micklow discuss the often-overlooked question of the medical response to wife assault. They claim that the medical profession, in focusing solely on immediate treatment of the battered woman, defines its responsibility as one based on a limited approach rather than a more comprehensive one. According to Eisenberg and Micklow, doctors do not consider prevention of wife abuse to be a "medical matter," but a social problem -- they assume that other avenues, such as police or prosecution, are more appropriately suited to address the concern. The overall "nonjudgmental approach" of doctors toward wife abuse results in the physicians's acceptance of fictitious explanations of abuse injuries (i.e., "I fell down the stairs") and in the failure to report wife abuse cases. The authors claim that physicians hesitate to probe too deeply for fear that the patient may not return for future treatment. Eisenberg and Micklow assert that the widespread problem of unreported cases is compounded by the absence of effective reporting procedures.

Fields, M. "Representing Battered Wives, or What to do Until the Police Arrive." Family Law Reporter, V. 3, N. 22, Section 4, (Monograph No. 25), April 1977.

This article reviews the legal obstacles a battered woman can expect to encounter. Fields bases her discussion on her experience in dealing with battered women at the Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation.

She describes and attacks the failure of the legal system to provide protection for battered women or to adequately address their special needs within the judicial system. She speaks both to shelter personnel and family law practitioners. To the former, Fields emphasizes the need for documentation of detailed facts of each case, including the extent of injuries, duration of the attack, weapons used in the attack, type of medical treatment, calls to police, and experience in the courts. Once set down, the information becomes a complete record which an attorney can then use to prepare a court case. Fields also strongly suggests that family law practitioners act as victim advocates with police and prosecutors to insure that their clients are protected.

Fleming, Jennifer Baker. Stopping Wife Abuse: A Guide to the Emotional, Psychological, and Legal Implications for the Abused Woman and Those Helping Her. Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979.

This is a comprehensive "how-to" book which addresses the myriad of personal and institutional problems associated with wife abuse. Fleming is both theoretical and practical in her approach, and both critical and hopeful in her assessment of the problem itself and of attempts to alleviate it.

Fleming begins her work by speaking directly to the battered woman, helping her to understand her feelings of guilt, fear, shame, and embarrassment, and her sense of powerlessness. While Fleming offers specific suggestions to the battered woman on how she can keep her children "physically and emotionally safe," she also outlines practical measures a woman may use to protect herself before, during, and after an attack.

Fleming then switches to address those who work with abuse victims, particularly mental health practitioners and medical and social service personnel. Here, Fleming comments on "the sexist attitudes that pervade traditional psychiatric thinking" and then provides a more "appropriate profile of the battered woman," by discussing the complex forces that keep a woman trapped in the abusive situation. Fleming emphasizes that both the women who leave and those who stay need support, and she finds that "group counseling" or "support groups" are "the most effective for promoting the emotional independence of the battered woman."

The book continues with a review of the legal system and explains not only the choices and obstacles the legal system poses for battered women, but also delineates the legal processes involved. She takes particular care to discuss the police response

to domestic violence calls and highlights the promise of new approaches to police training. In addition, a chapter on legislation underscores the improved court procedures in Pennsylvania, the expanded police authority in Oregon, and the introduction of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment bill in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Fleming continues with a discussion of the effect of violence on children and stresses the importance of training children to relate in non-violent ways, to break the cycle of violence. She then moves on to a particularly important topic, "Couple Counseling-- Counseling the Abuser," which gives the reader some insights into the abusers and describes some of the few existing counseling programs for abusers. Fleming also comments on research efforts in the field of wife abuse and the importance of statistical data. She then concludes with a primer on establishing shelter and support services, and lists programs providing services to battered women.

Gelles, Richard J. The Violent Home. Sage Library of Social Research, N. 13. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1972.

Gelles presents a study of 80 people and their experiences with conjugal violence. The information for his work was collected through unstructured, informal interviews.

The study refutes the social definition of the family as non-violent. It contains detailed analyses of the family as a training ground for violence, the social meaning of violent acts as understood by the study participants, and the circumstances under which the violence occurs. Gelles' analysis of how the participants perceive violence and of the meanings they attach to different forms of violence is particularly interesting. The study's subjects viewed many forms of violence as "normal" or "routine" acts of which the family approves: these acts are justified because they allow the husband to relieve tension, or are used to appease a hysterical spouse, or both. Other forms of violence include what Gelles terms "secondary violence," which he defines as spousal conflict resulting from disagreement on what is "normal violence" against a child. Gelles also discusses alcohol-related violence and "protective-reaction violence," which occurs when the woman attacks her husband with the intent to hurt him before he hurts her.

Gelles' findings lead him to conclude that "individual pathology" is a minor factor in conjugal violence. Rather, he asserts that the societal position and the structure of an individual family are important factors in that family's ability to cope with stress.

Gelles, Richard J. Family Violence. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1979.

Family Violence is a compilation of 11 essays, which are products of three federally funded and related research projects. The

essays are arranged under four subtopics: "Violence Toward Children," "Marital Violence," "Studying Family Violence," and "The Impact of Family Violence."

While Gelles' previous book, The Violent Home, presents data on the type and extent of violence used and discusses the social factors related to family violence, Family Violence makes a special contribution in the area of spouse abuse. First, in the essay outlined, "Violence and Pregnancy: A Note on the Extent of the Problem and Needed Services," Gelles notes that five major factors contribute to the vulnerability of pregnant women to abuse by their husbands: "(1) sexual frustration; (2) family transition, stress, and strain; (3) biochemical changes in the wife; (4) pre-natal child abuse; and (5) defenselessness of the wife." Gelles asserts that soon-to-be parents are often not ready to cope with the changes involved. Gelles thus sees a need not only for planned parenthood but also prepared parenthood, so that men and women can ready themselves for the many problems and stresses of pregnancy.

Finally, in the essay "Power, Sex, and Violence: The Case of the Marital Rape," Gelles states that marital rape, though "not possible in a strict legal sense" is happening and in some cases occurs subsequent to incidences of spousal violence. He says, "A focus on marital rape . . . tends to move this subject from the taken-for-granted into the problematic." Social science investigation into the problem, he asserts, "will provide valuable insights into the power relations in the family".

In Family Violence Gelles complements a wealth of research data with probing ethical and sociological questions concerning violence within the family. It is clearly an important addition to the insights in the family violence field.

Gentzler, Rie. The Abused--Advocacy Programs for Abused Women. Lancaster: Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence 1977.

This manual covers all the important stages of planning a shelter and provides a sound foundation on which to build a successful program. It is an excellent guide for those initiating or already involved in the operation of shelters for abuse victims. Gentzler takes the reader from the initial needs assessment and program philosophy through a discussion of goals and objectives, as well as finances, administration, personnel, and services. The author completes the discussion of planning with some suggestions on evaluation formats.

The Abused addresses other vital questions that arise during the process of organizing a program. For example, Gentzler emphasizes the importance of providing effective support to victims in their dealings with service agencies. That section is of particular interest because it illustrates a detail that is often overlooked in manuals of this type. It includes protocol models for hospital and police accompaniment.

The guidelines on hospital accompaniment contain especially insightful suggestions on how to conduct oneself in the emergency

and examining rooms; how to give emotional support to the victim; how to give her proper information; how to make suggestions to the victim; how to respect her privacy when relaying information to the police; and what not to do.

Available: Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence,  
2405 N. Front St., Harrisburg, PA 17110 (\$5.00).

Hepperle, Winifred L., and Crites, Laura, ed. Women in the Courts. Virginia: National Center for State Courts, 1978.

Ten contributing authors assess the wide range of women's participation in the judicial system.

Laura Crites, in her introduction, states that the book's purpose is to assess the extent of judicial commitment "to liberate women from their inferior status in American society." Crites emphasizes that judicial commitment to equal treatment for women is limited by the extent of judicial attachment to sex stereotypes of women.

Of particular interest is the chapter on the judicial treatment of rape and wife abuse victims, written by Margaret Gates. She points out that if the defense attorney is able to characterize the victim as less than "innocent," judges and juries are apt to presume that she is a "bad woman" and, therefore, vindictive, provocative, and even masochistic. Beyond those attitudinal problems, Gates documents from legal and social science research the failure of the courts to administer justice in such cases. She concludes that specific changes are needed in the law, but, more importantly, the enforcement of the law must be improved. An interesting section deals with a new theory of self-defense being used in the representation of women charged with killing a would-be rapist or abuser.

Winifred Hepperle, in concluding remarks, draws suggestions from the contributing authors on ways to improve the participatory role of women in the courts and to make the judicial system more responsive to women.

Available: National Center for State Courts, 300 Newport Avenue,  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185 (\$5.95).

Martin, Del. Battered Wives. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977,  
\$2.50 ppbk.

This is one of the first major comprehensive books published on spouse abuse. It is an excellent general resource on the subject, with contents ranging from analyses of the family, marriage, victim, and abuser to the more practical considerations of initiating shelters for battered women.

Although public awareness of family violence has increased significantly in the last two years, several of Martin's assessments are still valid. Two of them point up the unresponsiveness of the legal system and the lack of coordination of social services. In both cases, Martin illustrates the uphill battle that women face

in seeking remedies for the violence they experience in their lives.

An especially enlightening section of the book, "The Victim-- Why Does She Stay?", describes the complexities of the victim's situation and the factors that contribute to her inability to leave the violent home.

Battered Wives is required reading for those interested in learning more about the problem of spouse abuse.

Moore, Donna M., ed. Battered Women. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979, (\$8.95).

This collection of essays on battered women consists of an overview of the problem, a consideration of the social context of battering by Del Martin, a description by Lenore Walker of her "cycle theory" of battering, and two articles on the legal system's relationship to battered women, by Eva Jefferson Paterson and Sandra Blair. Donna Moore and Fran Pepitone-Rockwell present their research findings and data compiled from a questionnaire circulated at a 1978 battered women's conference at the University of California, Davis.

Appendices include a handbook on the legal rights of battered women prepared by the Legal Committee of La Casa de las Madres and the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women. It covers criminal and civil law as well as restraining orders, money problems, military law, and a short glossary of terms. Another appendix makes suggestions for public policy, and a third provides a short bibliography of materials on battered women, which include "how-to" sources.

Moore suggests that "every segment of society must take responsibility for recognizing that battering occurs and exploring how it might be able to decrease battering and respond to the needs of an entire unit: the battered woman, her batterer, and her children."

Roy, Maria. Battered Women: A Psychosociological Study of Domestic Violence. Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1977. (\$9.95)

Roy, founder and Executive Director of Abused Women's Aid in Crisis, Inc., has compiled a comprehensive view of the battered wife syndrome. Her collection includes articles by psychologists, sociologists, law enforcement officials, and authorities from community programs.

The book begins with a concise history of wife-beating and illustrates how our culture has tolerated and condoned the use of physical force to resolve marital conflicts. It then presents a survey of 150 wife-beating cases, examines the social dynamics of the battering syndrome, and explains the cyclical pattern of children repeating their parents' behavior.

The book addresses the questions most frequently asked about wife-beating, "Why do women stay with men who abuse them?" and "What is the role of drugs, alcohol, sexual, and financial stress?" Descriptions of the men and women involved in violent relationships are explored by psychologists, and one neurological theory

of violence is presented. The legal aspects of wife-battering are covered, but they pertain mainly to New York state, which has a system of family courts that differs from many other jurisdictions. The most valuable portion of the book is the last section, on future trends and legislative needs. Roy proposes a model for services, and a sociological perspective of prevention and treatment of wife beating is offered by Dr. Murray Straus, a well-known family violence researcher.

Available: AWAIC, GPO Box 1699, New York, N.Y. 10001 (\$9.95).

"Spouse Abuse: A Special Issue". Victimology: An International Journal. V. 2, N. 3-4, 1978.

The 16 articles included in this special issue of Victimology make a significant contribution to the study of domestic violence. The contents are well-balanced, including broad and specific articles by researchers and service providers from many countries. Also included are a book review section and notes on projects and recent research.

The articles on spouse abuse in West Germany and Africa are particularly helpful in understanding the problem of domestic violence in other cultures. "The Growth of the British Movement for Battered Women" illustrates the responses to spouse abuse and strategies for solution by a culture similar to our own.

"Battered Wives and Powerlessness: What Can Counselors Do?" and "Services for Battered Women: Looking for a Perspective" are useful selections for professionals assisting abused women. The first discusses emotional reactions of battered clients, and suggests productive ways counselors may respond to those reactions. The second is an analysis of the victim's needs, the stereotypes surrounding the abuse situation, and programmatic responses. The diversity of service providers and their agencies is discussed as a potential strength if they develop cooperation and flexibility among themselves.

Especially noteworthy is the article by Murray A. Straus, "Wife Beating: How Common and Why?" which presents the findings of a study of over 2,000 American couples, the largest national sample to date that focuses on domestic violence. The study confirms that wife-beating is widespread. Straus estimates that "in any one year, 1.8 million wives are beaten by their husbands." Basing his assessments on the data, Straus describes the incidence, frequency, and specific acts of violence.

In the second half of the article, Straus discusses the causes of wife-beating. Basically, his thesis attributes "the causes of wife-beating . . . [to] . . . the very structure of American society and its family system," each of which condones the use of violence whether it is used "to maintain the status quo or to achieve desirable ends" for the nation or for rearing children.

The family, Straus asserts, is especially prone to conflict, due to the intense and intimate nature of its interrelationships. Yet, cultural norms, sexual inequality, and the violent society



are also crucial factors. According to Straus, "The sexist organization of the society and its family system is one of the most fundamental factors accounting for the high level of wife-beating." However, elimination of the problem "depends not only on eliminating sexual inequality, but also on altering the system of violence on which so much of American society depends."

Available: Visage Press, Inc., 3409 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20016.

Stark, Evan; Flitcraft, Anne; and Frazier, William. "Medicine and Patriarchal Violence: The Social Construction of a 'Private' Event." International Journal of Health Services, V. 9, N. 3, 1979.

This multidisciplinary team of researchers at Yale Medical School investigated the response of emergency medical services to victims of domestic violence and found that physicians often treat victims' symptoms and ignore the underlying problem of battery. The improper initial treatment combines with the physical abuse to create secondary problems for the victims.

The team's investigation revealed that "where [emergency room] physicians identified one out of 35 patients as battered, a more accurate approximation is one in four; where they calculated that one injury out of 20 resulted from domestic abuse, the actual figure may approach one in two. What they described as a rare occurrence is in reality an event of epidemic proportions." In fact, actual victims of domestic violence are seldom identified as such by emergency room personnel.

The team also determined that certain practices of physicians who treat a domestic violence victim have a crucial effect upon the victim and the aftermath of her injury. Perhaps the most striking example of that discovery is the apparent propensity of physicians to prescribe minor tranquilizers or pain medications to victims of domestic abuse. Nearly one in four battered women (24 percent) received prescriptions for such medications compared with fewer than one in ten nonbattered women (nine percent). Given the cyclical and escalating pattern of domestic abuse crises, this seems a poor therapeutic choice. They label it a dangerous practice considering that victims of domestic battering have been shown to be at greater suicide risk than victims of violence by strangers.

When the battered victim first enters the emergency room, her physical injuries are treated symptomatically. But as the woman reappears periodically, her record will increasingly contain notations describing, along with her injuries, "vague medical complaints," and secondary symptoms such as "trouble with neighbors," "alcoholic," "fear of child abuse," "suicide," and a myriad of mental illnesses. "At this point," the researchers believe, "medicine in effect acknowledges what the patient has

recognized from the start, namely, that therapy designed to provide symptomatic relief to emergency complaints is wholly ineffective against her 'condition.'"

As the study points out, "medicine disposes of battering by characterizing it as a psychiatric problem for the victim," and suggests that the victim is responsible for her victimization. "Psychiatric referrals," continue the researchers, "follow non-battering injuries only four percent of the time, while the largely unidentified victims of battering were referred 15 percent of the time to emergency psychiatric facilities, clinics, local community mental health centers or the state mental hospital." Often the victim's real problem is further ignored when the mental health agency to which she is referred treats her secondary symptoms as if they were the primary problem. The researchers contend that mental health practitioners tend to place too much emphasis on maintaining the family unit intact as a therapeutic goal.

According to Dr. Flitcraft and her colleagues, those examples of medicine's response to cases of battering contribute to what they term a "staging process" through which the consequences of battering are socially determined. Their data indicate that soon after being subjected to deliberate violent assaults, victims often suffer personal stress, psychiatric disorders, and self-abuse. The critical nature of this period is illustrated by the team's finding that "one of every four battered women attempted suicide at least once; one in seven abused alcohol; one in ten abused drugs; more than one in three were referred to emergency psychiatric services and community mental health centers; and one in seven was eventually committed to the state mental hospital." "In the majority of cases," say the researchers, "such problems emerge only after the first incident suggestive of abuse."

The complex theories developed by the Yale team stem from research subsequent to a pilot study made by Dr. Flitcraft for her doctoral thesis. The purpose of the initial study was to determine the number of battered women that seek emergency medical treatment. To this end, Dr. Flitcraft studied the medical histories of 481 women between the ages of 16 and 98 who attended the emergency room of the Yale-New Haven Hospital during December 1975. She found that 2.8 percent of the cases were positive victims of abuse, 5.2 percent were probable, 9.8 percent suggested abuse, and 82.2 percent were negative. Later, Dr. Flitcraft expanded her analysis of the sample histories to include entries for the years between 1970 and 1976. With the additional data, the statistics changed significantly: 9.6 percent of the women became classified as positive victims of abuse, 4.8 percent were found to be probable victims, 10.6 percent were suggestive, and 75 percent were negative.

Dr. Flitcraft analyzed the records to determine whether some parts of the body may be at greater risk of injury through battering than others. She found that certain patterns of injury appear to be disproportionately linked to marital abuse, both as positive and negative indicators that such abuse may have occurred. According to Dr. Flitcraft's findings, multiple injuries to the back, head, chest, breast, or abdominal area should serve to

heighten the attending physician's index of suspicion. Yet, Flitcraft warns that such signs cannot preclude "a careful history and sympathetic patient interview." In addition, Dr. Flitcraft found that pregnancy appeared to be related to battering -- pregnant women seem to be at high risk of deliberate assaults by their mates.

Steinmetz, Susan K., and Straus, Murray A. Violence in the Family. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

This work is a compilation of 38 papers drawn from a literature review of the subject of violence in the family. One section deals with violence between spouses and kin and contains articles of interest to those involved in providing social or criminal justice assistance to victims of marital violence.

Several interpretations of the underlying causes of marital violence are presented. For example, Robert N. Whitehurst, in "Violence in Husband-Wife Interaction," postulates that the major cause is an attempt by a husband to establish or reaffirm his superior sex-role status vis-a-vis his wife. He suggests that the short-run effect of equality between men and women is likely to be an increase in marital violence, since "the idea of male superiority is still the dominant ideology in our society." However, the long-run effect of rearing children with more egalitarian values might well be a reduction of physically violent conflict between spouses.

In "Physical Abuse Among Applicants for Divorce," George Levinger says that in a sample of 600 couples who applied for divorce, 37 percent of the divorcing wives complained of physical abuse in the marriage. Stuart Palmer, author of "Family Members as Murder Victims," points out that a disproportionately large number of offenders in family crimes were wives who had killed their husbands. Over a period of time, the husband had assaulted the wife, perhaps repeatedly, leading the wife to retaliate by killing him. Parts 3 and 4 of the book deal with "Violent Parents" and "The Family as Training Ground for Societal Violence."

The book's strength lies in its comprehensive documentation of the spouse abuse problem and its analysis of root causes. The collection provides persuasive evidence that researchers, the criminal justice system, and community service agencies must address the problem of intrafamily violence and determine their roles in helping to resolve the problem.

Walker, Lenore E. The Battered Woman. New York: Harper and Row, 1979, \$10.95.

Walker's work is the first full-volume attempt to describe a psychology of battered women. She posits that Seligman's theory of "learned helplessness" applies to victims of wife-beating. That theory holds that once persons feel that they are helpless and unable to control events in their lives, it is difficult for them to

believe they will ever be able to control their own lives, even if a favorable experience indicates the opposite. "Once the women are operating from a belief of helplessness," says Walker, "the perception becomes reality and they become passive, submissive, helpless."

Walker uses the concept to explain the seemingly endless variety of barriers and difficulties that women experience in extricating themselves from violent relationships. Society reinforces feelings of helplessness, according to Walker, by failing to provide spouse abuse victims with effective social services and criminal justice responses.

Walker uses her own case studies not merely to provoke readers' empathy but to increase individual and professional understanding of the behavior of battered wives. A lengthy section details the variety of coercive techniques used by batterers. It illuminates effectively the role of economic deprivation in such relationships, and examines the specifics of physical, sexual, and social abuse.

Perhaps Walker's most significant contribution to the treatment of battered wives is her theory of the cyclical nature of battering. Walker believes that the battering cycle has three distinct phases: the tension-building phase, the explosion or acute battering incident, and the calm, loving respite. While Walker cautions that the phases vary in time and intensity in the same couple, and from couple to couple, she presents evidence that situational events can influence the onset of each phase. For example, Walker tells of a victim whose husband remained at the "tension-building phase" for increasingly longer periods of time as their children grew older. "Once the children were out of the home, phase one could last for several years before an acute battering incident would occur. Ten years had passed without an acute battering incident when one of the couple's children was killed in an accident. Her husband expressed his grief by beating her so severely that she was hospitalized for several months." Walker's theory offers important treatment considerations to professionals working with battered wives who attempt to continue their marital relationship.

The book concludes with a section entitled "The Way Out," which examines safe houses, legal and medical alternatives, and analyzes the various forms of psychotherapy used by professionals whose clients are victims and abusers.

Wooley, Sandra F. Battered Women: A Summary. 30 pp., 1978.

This booklet is an introduction to the problem of wife abuse. Topics include retrospective and current data on wife abuse, the social context in which abuse occurs, and causal theories. The booklet also discusses the legal aspects of wife abuse and enumerates recommendations for both prevention and treatment. A summary of available materials and a short bibliography are included.



Available: Women's Equity Action League, 805 15th St., N.W.,  
Suite 822, Washington, D.C. 20005 (\$2.00).

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