

CALCASA

CALIFORNIA COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

A Newsletter of The California

Coalition Against Sexual Assault

That Other Violence Against Women: Rape

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For those of us working at rape crisis centers it has been frustrating to experience the neglect of sexual assault as a serious issue by funders, policy makers, the public and the media. Since O.J. Simpson was charged and tried for the murder of his ex-wife and her friend, domestic violence has been in the forefront of the public's conscience as never before. Being America's ugly family secret, it has garnered the attention it certainly deserves. However, rape and sexual assault has been relegated and referred to as that "other violence against women."

Both domestic violence and sexual assault have a stranglehold on women and girls. Unfortunately, we live in an era in which it is difficult to focus on more than one issue at a time, and-even more unfortunate the sensational and the celebrity take precedence over any issue. Rape crisis center workers along with their counter parts in domestic violence shelters and programs know of the enormous toll that violence against women in all of its debilitating forms takes on a daily basis.

The invisibility of sexual assault is not new. Since victims can be so easily re-victimized and stigmatized they often don't tell, don't report and-with a few exceptions—don't go "public" with their stories. What is

new is the distinct compartmentalizing of sexual and domestic violence. Historically and philosophically the movements are intertwined. The domestic violence movement patterned much of its beginnings after the organizing the anti-rape movement had done in the very early seventies. Rape survivors helped create and shape the rape crisis movement just as battered women helped create and shape the domestic violence movement. Both movements grew and developed the essential expertise of the specific issues unique to each. Both movements are steeped in women's rights, empowerment and self-determination. The pioneers of both movements were in complete agreement when they named sexism and its manifestations of rape and battering as the focus of vital efforts.

Many centers in California and across the country serve victims/survivors of both rape and domestic violence. Some centers do so based upon a philosophical stand, or because of history, others-such as those in rural areas-because of community needs compounded with a lack of resources in the area. Across the nation, we can find some state coalitions that have a dual focus of sexual and domestic violence. The benefits of unifying the "two

movements" are many. Political organizing, community education, education of teens and children, prevention work, etc. is facilitated by networking, sharing and promoting the work together.

Law enforcement, politicians, therapists, legal and "corrections" systems are being challenged to view violence-and, especially, their own responses to it-as linked. This creates both positive and negative tensions. More and more, rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters are required to coordinate responses, create collaborations, etc. with these different entities. What we need to do more of now is collaborate with each other.

By now we have all heard something of the Violence Against Women Crime Act. It is historical for several reasons. It includes both domestic violence and sexual assault as designated gender-based violence. Each state is required to submit a plan to the federal government to qualify for funding. In California, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning formed a committee of 32 people from various disciplines including rape crisis, domestic violence, law enforcement, district attorneys, etc. to come up with a plan for the STOP Program (the first part of the VAWA funding). These meetings provided

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