

WIFE ABUSE AND PUBLIC POLICY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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INTRODUCTION

Boys and girls play innocent games together in childhood and interact honestly, as only children can, but they often grow up as men and women who engage in brutal, mutual destruction. Wife abuse is one of the most under-reported crimes in the United States, and is even more under-reported than rape. One sociologist estimates that 1.8 million American wives are badly beaten (Straus, 1978).

Wife abuse lacks clarity as a legal concept. Despite existing definitions, the expression *family trouble* is often the official euphemism for wife beating. One judge defines wife abuse as the regular practice of violence and torture (Langley & Levy, 1977 4). The term *battered wife* is applied to married and unmarried women who live with violent men. It refers to any woman beaten by her mate, whether legally married or not (Martin 1975 xiii). An operational definition, which I use here, is given by social scientists as violence against the female member of the couple by the male member of the couple by pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, knifing, shooting, or throwing an object (Gelles 1972 20).

Wife abuse is studied piecemeal from various perspectives. 1) One approach is the legal dimensions of wife abuse and the legal remedies and social services for abused wives (Fields 1977; Gill & Coote 1975). 2) Wife abuse is studied as an aspect of behavior and environment (Prescott & Letko 1977; Scott 1974; Shainess 1977). 3) Wife abuse is studied from a feminist orientation, which applies self-determination, self-sufficiency, and the equal status of women to the problem (Becker & Abel 1977).

Although there is a need for greater identification of issues related to wife abuse, there has been no attempt to identify the interaction of the components relating to wife abuse based on existing research (Schlyer 1976). Effective policy making requires knowledge of the processes of wife abuse. The few existing government programs designed to help the participants of wife abuse cannot be evaluated without appreciating all the variables at play in the wife-abuse phenomenon. No conceptual model exists that shows the interaction of the components of wife abuse in terms of

social, legal, and personal goals.

THE MODEL

A policy model is an abstraction and an attempt to simplify, clarify, and understand some aspect of policy (Dye 1972 35). 1) To be useful, a model should order and simplify the significant aspects of a policy area. 2) A model should use empirical referents, so as to be congruent with reality. 3) A model should be meaningful. 4) A model should prompt inquiry and research into the policy area.

Because wife abuse has been identified as a public problem, policy makers are developing programs designed for positive impact on the problem. The model diagrammed in Figure 1 allows policy makers to locate their program relative to the policy process, and examine how it interacts with other components in the policy process. Research not addressing the interaction of the components of wife abuse does not help policy makers assess social programs.

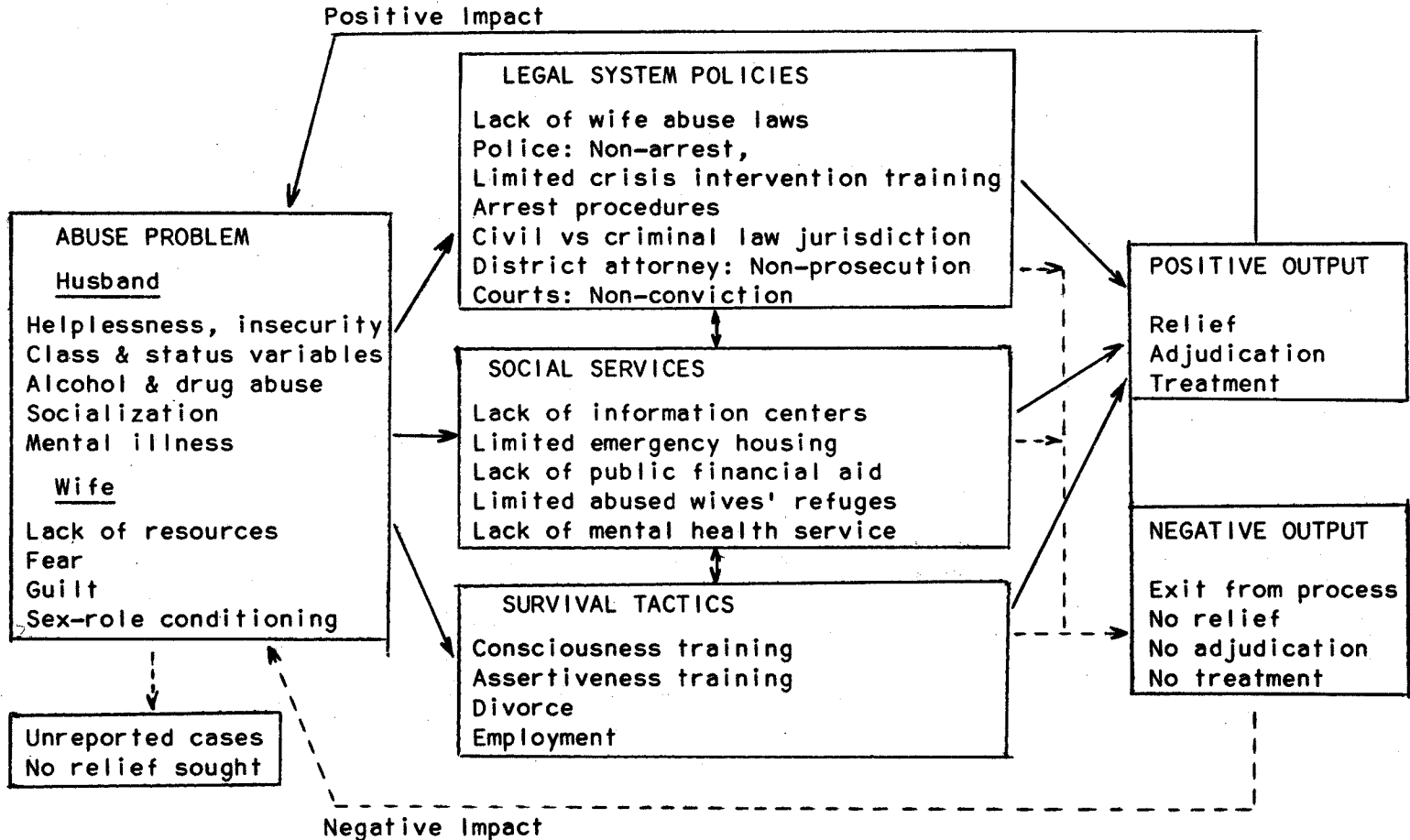
There has been little evaluation of the few existing programs designed to help the victims and offenders in wife abuse. Since many of these programs try to treat only specific aspects of wife abuse, we must evaluate the impact of the programs on the whole process of wife abuse. For example, although an alcohol-abuse center has successfully treated many wifebeaters, this may only mean that they now beat their wives while sober.

The model is operational in that it refers directly to observable real-world phenomena. It gives direction to policymakers who are formulating or evaluating public programs.

THE PROBLEM

The problem components are the elements most commonly found in the abusive setting. These factors do not necessarily cause abuse, but they are present in an abusive setting. The model identifies several characteristics of the batterer. The abusive husband may be terrifying to the battered wife, but he often projects an aura of helplessness and insecurity. Though he puts up a good front in public, in the privacy and intimacy of his home, he may not be able to hide his feelings of inadequacy and

FIGURE 1: MODEL OF PUBLIC POLICY RELATIVE TO WIFE ABUSE



low self-esteem. Husbands who lack certain valued personal traits and material resources tend to substitute physical violence to maintain a position of superiority (Allen & Straus 1975).

Some authors link domestic violence to class and social status, but others assert that there is no prevailing data to bear out the contention that members of working-class families are more violent toward one another than members of middle-class families (Gelles 1972 Ch 4; Martin 1976 53). Others suggest that a *change* of class and social status, rather than class and status as such, produce tension and domestic violence (Langley & Levy 1977 85). Drunkenness and alcoholism are involved in at least half of all reported wife-abuse cases, although one study reports a contrary finding (Bard & Zacker 1974). It is unclear whether the batterer becomes drunk in order to become abusive, or becomes abusive because he is drunk. Most researchers think that drinking is a way for the batterer to avoid responsibility for violence, and a way for the victim to blame the attack on alcohol rather than on her mate. It also appears that socialization plays a role in the batterer's abusiveness. One researcher concludes that domestic violence will continue while aggression and physical violence are acceptable responses to stress and frustration (Carlson 1977).

Finally, mental illness often leads to abuse. Though mental illness is not a factor for most wife beaters, some are diagnosed as paranoid, schizophrenic, with psycho-emotional immaturity or extreme irrational fear. A wife is believed to be a surrogate for the abuser's self-hatred. Such wife beaters often are filled with intense feelings of guilt, and become despondent and deeply depressed, which may lead to murder and/or suicide.

THE BATTERED WIFE

The model includes the characteristics of the battered woman. It is hard for many men to understand why a wife does not leave a wifebeater. The prime reason is that the abused woman usually lacks resources to provide for her own support. This is an enormous problem if young children are involved. Wives are ineligible for any type of government assistance unless legally separated, divorced, or abandoned. Even then it takes a 30-day waiting period to apply for federal aid (LSCRR 1977 3).

Fear also prevents an abused wife's leaving home. Police rarely arrest the batterer, and when they leave, the abuse may be resumed even more fiercely. And battered women who do leave home are sometimes stalked by their husbands. Guilt about a failed marriage also accounts for an abused wife's refusal to leave home. Many abused wives feel that their husbands need them, since the abusive man is perceived as sick and in need of help from his wife.

Abused women are socialized to feel that it is their responsibility to stick with their mate because sex-role conditioning leads them to expect physical abuse as a part of marriage. There is a link between women who were abused as children and those who accept abuse as adults (Ginglod 1976). The abused wife's tendency to stay with the abuser is directly related to the severity of the treatment she received from parents in childhood, and inversely related to the severity and frequency of attacks from her husband (Gelles 1976).

Most cases of wife abuse are not reported to policy agencies or other public agencies, and no relief is sought. As the model indicates in Figure 1, the abused wife can seek help in any of three directions, through legal systems, social agencies, or survival tactics, and she can shift from one to another, if relief and assistance is not found.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The legal system falls short in several ways in dealing with wife-abuse cases essentially because different laws apply to married and single women. The offenses most often charged against a wifebeater are assault, and intent to assault or to commit murder. Where a woman is coerced sexually, rape may be charged, but is usually excluded from statutes in the confines of marriage. In June 1979, 34 states had specific statutes providing civil remedies and criminal proceedings for wife abuse (Center for Women Policy Studies 1979). These statutes for the most part only concern procedures for obtaining and penalties for the violation of restraining orders and peace orders which the courts have directed.

The police department is often the only public agency readily accessible at all hours, but many departments delay or deny any direct intervention. They give domestic-disturbance calls a low priority.

Moreover, the risk factor is high, since some 13 percent of policemen were killed when responding to family-disturbance complaints (Bard 1977). Evaluations of the few police domestic crisis intervention programs are equivocal (Bard 1969; Liebman & Schwartz 1972; Rochester Police Bureau 1974; Stephens 1977). Police personnel commonly believe that family calls are not an appropriate police function. They rarely witness acts of marital violence since they usually arrive after the fact. For this reason, the officer cannot make an arrest in a misdemeanor case. If a felony is committed, the officer may arrest on *probable cause*, if he believes that a felony was committed, and that the person identified by the victim or witnesses committed the offense.

In practice, despite the fact that assault is a crime, most of the remedies open to the battered wife fall under civil law. Signing a complaint against the batterer is the most common procedure in legal cases. Most states have a restraining order, which is in effect for a limited time. The court order usually requires that the husband stay away from the wife and/or abstain from the offensive conduct. It is usually issued only after divorce proceedings are started. A peace bond is a frequent form of protection. After a hearing, a judge may issue a warrant and order the husband to post up to \$5,000 as security to keep the peace.

The abused wife has the alternative of filing a criminal complaint with the district attorney. If the district attorney authorizes the complaint, the judge is asked to issue an arrest warrant against the husband. Local district attorneys' offices use various devices to exclude complaints in which a conviction is not guaranteed. For example, of several thousand cases processed by the San Francisco Bureau of Family Relations in 1973-1974, only eight complaints were authorized by the district attorney (Martin 1976 109; Parnas 1973).

Thus, the police have a policy of non-arrest, and the district attorney has a policy of non-prosecution. If a case reaches the courtroom, the abused wife meets further resistance. The judge tends to side with the abusive husband in a wife-beating case, and is lenient with the batterer, who may be put on probation along with the wife, to the same probation officer who is supposed to reconcile their differences. The judge is lenient because of cynicism on the intent of

female complaints. A woman is often required to prove herself a *worthy victim*, showing that she did nothing to provoke assault (Pagelow 1977). Often the woman continues to live with her batterer and may have forgiven the attack by the time of the trial. The abused wife sometimes changes her testimony or asks for dismissal of charges against her husband.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Though social services attempt to provide help for abused women, they are inadequate for the purpose. Many agencies do not accept abused wives as clients, and very few cater to their needs. There is no central location where a woman can seek information about social services. However, some cities have compiled directories of social services with descriptions of the services, and one county chapter of the National Organization for Women has published a guide for organizing a wife-assault task-force program (Fojtic 1976).

There are a few shelters that are specifically set up to receive abused wives and their children, but conditions are crowded, government and private contributions of funds are insufficient. Many cities have none. The shelters exist to provide a supportive situation for battered women and their children until the women can decide what to do. The wives are advised of legal and social-service alternatives. Locations of such shelters are not published, to discourage violent husbands from pursuing their wives.

In cases where the husband is thought to be mentally ill, the abused wife has two problems. 1) No mental-health service is prepared especially for mentally disturbed battering husbands. 2) The husband must also be willing to volunteer for examination and treatment.

SURVIVAL TACTICS

The response of the legal system and social services to the wife-abuse program is not encouraging. But a woman can employ survival tactics. She can gain a new perspective by realizing that she can survive independently, without a man to provide for her. Breaking down traditional, mythological sex roles is one goal of consciousness-raising groups. A woman can come to realize that she does not have to endure abuse, and that there are men in

society who do not abuse their consorts.

Assertiveness training also helps women express awareness gained in consciousness raising. Assertiveness cannot work in the situation where the woman accepts an inferior role to the husband. It may even generate worse abuse.

For many abused women who believe in the necessity of conventional marriage, divorce may seem worse than the abuse. Many divorce lawyers do not want to be bothered with wifebeating cases because of the paperwork and court appearances to get restraining orders and the problems of protecting the client while the case is pending. In many states, physical cruelty is not grounds for divorce, and where it is, a sufficient number of beatings must occur over several years to qualify as physical cruelty.

Abused women often withdraw from the policy process due to bias in the legal system, the inadequacy of social services, or the inability to use survival tactics. However, some women do receive relief by the legal system, social services, or use of survival tactics.

The system output for those who get relief from the policy process consists of successful adjudication, treatment, or survival tactics. The output of the system for women who withdraw consists of cynicism, frustration, disappointment, and probably, continued abuse. They have received no relief from the system, and this has a negative impact on the problem.

Until policy makers formulate and implement comprehensive policies that take into consideration the interaction of the significant components of wife abuse, many men and women will continue their tragic mutual destruction.

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work. 2) They negate resistance. By increasing its social power, the bureaucracy pushes the professional worker and the intellectual worker into lower positions of status and pay. This proletarianizes intellectual labor (Larson 1980 133). Downgrading professions and intellectual constructions promotes inauthenticity of institutions and persons. Institutions deny responsibility to individuals and individuals deny this denial by acting falsely as if admitting that their needs are met. The institutional denial of responsibility for workers takes the form of cost-efficient, but inferior productivity, and the reduction of reassignment of highly paid personnel. The downgrading is ideologically garbed by institutional administrators as burnout in the workers, and this definition is inauthentically accepted by the workers.

SUMMARY

Structural inauthenticity in modern industrial society, as demonstrated by the three dimensions of alienation, subjects persons to economic, organizational and technical forces which they neither understand nor control. And inauthenticity becomes apparent as these alienating conditions are masked by an ideology of responsiveness, leaving basic human needs unmet. The ideology of responsiveness takes the form of negating the resistance of workers to these alienative structures. "The forms of indirect control, as input-output control, management by objectives, impersonal cybernetic control, control of boundary processes, indoctrination, preselection of information, persons, and means, are successfully applied to reduce the amount of direct resistance." (Rus 1980 10)

The indirect effect of using the lie to subordinate human needs to structural needs will increase the social demand for truth. It will increasingly validate authenticity. Mechanical response to human needs will be increasingly repudiated. Professional upgrading, burnout and inauthentic institutional care will appear as proletarianization of intellectual labor and professions. They will also appear as techniques for resisting the power of workers to resist alienating inauthentic institutions where they encroach

on society and where they deny human needs.

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