

DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE

Intervention:

A GENERIC SERVICE MODEL



Photo: Gord Erb

*A Summary of a Paper by Mary Lassance Parthun and Gloria Hart**

Ces quatre dernières années, l'agence Catholic Family Services de Toronto a développé un programme pour les cas de violence à domicile, programme intégré au programme général. Sa philosophie est basée sur trois points: ce qui a été écrit sur la violence à domicile, avec l'influence de la prise de conscience féministe; des valeurs catholiques; et l'expérience du personnel. L'agence s'occupe des cas qui leur sont référés, de l'information du public, des appels d'urgence, des contacts suivis, de groupes de soutien pour les femmes battues et de programmes spéciaux pour les hommes qui battent leur femme. L'agence travaille étroitement avec les services légaux et sociaux pour mieux servir les besoins de chacun.

During the past four years, Catholic Family Services of Toronto has developed a domestic-violence program which is integrated into the total agency program. One social worker in each of the four agency teams is assigned responsibility for support groups and for pursuing an advocacy function, but all members of the staff are expected to develop and use expertise in the area of domestic violence. In this way

domestic-violence cases are only a part of each person's case load, an arrangement which provides for top-quality service and diminishes "burn-out."

In carrying out this program, the agency has found the Domestic-Violence Consultation Committee, which meets monthly, invaluable in disseminating information and skills throughout the agency. One new procedure recommended by the committee is the practice of asking a question regarding domestic violence at the telephone-intake level. Such a question "gives permission" to the client to discuss this taboo subject. The committee is also a useful tool for documenting incidents of abuse from agency records.

The philosophy of the program is drawn from three basic sources: (1) the growing literature on the subject of domestic violence, influenced by feminist consciousness; (2) a Catholic value base; and (3) the experience of the staff. First, the seriousness of violent behaviour must be recognized, and intervention must ensure that violence ceases before anything else can be dealt with. Second, the agency is

concerned with preserving the bond of Catholic marriage and family life, but not at the expense of the safety of the family members or the quality of the relationship. Finally, the agency must give help to persons from cultural, political, and philosophical backgrounds not necessarily shared by the social workers of the agency. The agency is committed to assisting people to develop an inhibition against the use of physical violence, without having completely to surrender their entire approach to social roles (a particularly important approach with many members of ethnic cultures). It must also not be forgotten that violence is criminal behaviour and must be treated as such.

The agency handles referrals, public information, emergency calls, follow-up contact, and support groups for battered women. It also does outreach to batterers and offers them services, including consciousness-raising. Assertiveness training for both parties is also important. Finally, if at a later period marital counselling seems indicated, the agency will help with the choice of counsellor. The

agency also runs groups for children to help them come to terms with domestic violence and deal with it.

In summary, the domestic-violence program at Catholic Family Services is a program without walls. We extend into the community in our work on behalf of the client in close collaboration with a myriad of services: police, legal, medical, community, volunteer, and in our using of religious houses and supports in the community to serve individual clients. We carry on a continual public-education program aimed at a broad spectrum of individuals who come in

contact with people and can be helped by a greater depth of understanding of the personal, social, and overall implications of domestic violence in the community.

Our position at Catholic Family Services is enviable, in the sense that we are in touch with such a wide spectrum of community groups. Our contacts extend from very traditional ethnic parishes through fairly mainstream middle-, lower-middle-, and upper-middle-class individuals, groups, and organizations to the very avant-garde. The opportunity to be in touch with all these potential referral sources and formative agents of

public opinion is a very crucial role and puts us in a key position in dealing with the problem of domestic violence.

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**A complete text of the paper is available from the authors at Catholic Family Services, 17 Queen Street East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M5C 1P9; (416) 362-2481.*



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