

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF MEN

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Minutes for the Twenty-Eighth Commission Meeting

June 30, 2006 1-4 PM

Legislative Office Building Room 206, Concord, NH

These minutes were taken by Scott Garman.

Members Present: Scott Garman, Michael Geanoulis, Marshall Hickok, David Lauren, Joe Mastromarino.

Members Absent: Stephen Gorin, Gus Lerandau.

Chair Joe Mastromarino called the meeting to order and began with Commissioner introductions. Dr. Murray Straus was then invited to speak.

Dr. Murray Straus Testimony

Dr. Straus is Co-director of the University of New Hampshire Family Research Laboratory in Durham, NH. He spoke extensively on issues related to domestic violence and its impact on men. An audio recording of this testimony is available in MP3 format on the Commission's web site (http://www.nh.gov/csm/dv_straus.html). A summary of highlights from Dr. Straus' testimony appears below.

Dr. Straus recently presented a new research paper a few weeks ago, an international study of partner violence among younger populations (university students).

This paper is one in a series originating from a five-year International Dating Violence study, which includes data from 32 countries and student respondents from 68 universities.

University student populations differ significantly from the general population in terms of dating violence. Three to five times as much dating violence occurs in university student populations compared to the general population. The major factor in this difference is age. Even when married couples are compared, there is on average more violence among younger married couples (18-21) when compared to older couples.

The numbers arrived at in Straus' research are minimal estimates, which rely on self-reporting. There is a degree of under-reporting involved in these survey interviews. There is not a statistically significant difference between the under-reporting rates of men and women in these surveys.

Police data and crime reports, at best, describe 1/80th of all domestic assaults, due to the circumstances required for cases to obtain police involvement. Further, their sample is unrepresentative of the overall population, but most relevant to policy decisions.

Police reporting of domestic violence against men is under-reported due to numerous social factors. There are many examples Dr. Straus is aware of where reporting of male victimization is not taken seriously by authorities.

Many police training manuals exist with gender bias, and refer to the perpetrator exclusively as "he" or "him," and the victim as "she" or "her."

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was developed by Dr. Straus in the 1970's, has been used in hundreds of family violence studies around the world, and has demonstrated its validity and dependability over and over again. Criticisms of the CTS to date have not been based on empirical data and have not presented evidence to invalidate it.

Dominance in a relationship is a factor in domestic violence, but it is not the only factor; it is one of many. The strongest factors in domestic violence occur in about the same frequency in men and women, for example, the desire to correct unwanted or unacceptable behavior, which is the strongest factor contributing to domestic assaults.

The rate of injury is a gender-related factor in domestic violence. Assaults by men are three times as likely to cause serious injury than those by women.

Of partner homicides over the last 20 years, approximately one-third are perpetrated by women.

One of the reasons why social awareness of this research is so limited has to do with the way the media works. In its efforts to always present multiple, often opposing perspectives on issues, there is an obligation in media reporting to interview women's advocates whenever a story about domestic violence research is printed. While this model that the media uses is useful in many contexts, many people don't recognize that when it comes to scientific research, the contrasting views presented in the news often come from people without reliable or unbiased empirical data to back up their claims.

There is no statistically significant difference between men and women in the initiation of domestic assaults.

The findings of the International Dating Violence Study found that in cases of domestic assaults:

* Males were the sole perpetrators in 9.9% of these cases.

* Females were the sole perpetrators in 21.4% of these cases.

* Both parties mutually perpetrated domestic assaults in the remaining 68.6% of these cases.

Dr. Straus' studies have found that self-defense is a factor, on average, in about 15% of domestic assault cases, and that it is a nearly equal factor for men and women. Most partner violence is not in self-defense.

New Hampshire's data on domestic homicides are somewhat different from the national FBI statistics on domestic homicides because the number of homicides in NH is so low. David Lauren noted that the most recent report from the NH Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee states that 19 domestic homicides occurred between 1990 and 2003, and only one was perpetrated by a female. Dr. Straus pointed out that an *n* of 19 is insufficient to generate statistical trends from.

Addendum: The number David Lauren cited of only one homicide committed by a female was incorrect and came from a small subset of all domestic homicides included in the report. The report states that 121 domestic homicides were perpetrated by males, and 18 by females during the same time period. Eighteen still does not reflect an *n* large enough to generate statistical trends from.

When asked about specific recommendations he would support to help the status of men, Dr. Straus suggested the following:

* That domestic violence awareness and prevention programs in public schools, some as early as middle school, be reviewed to ensure that they address violence both by men and women. Overwhelmingly these programs do not address violence by young women, which in fact is more frequent than violence by young males. The only program Dr. Straus is aware of that does address these issues is by Vangee Foshee at the University of North Carolina Medical School, and was sponsored by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

* The creation of public service announcements that are balanced, and mention violence by women as well as men.

* That school-based violence prevention programs also raise awareness about the negative effects of parents spanking/using corporeal punishment on children. Being spanked as a child has a significant correlation with committing partner violence later in life. Corporeal punishment establishes a moral understanding that hitting someone is a valid method of correcting unwanted behavior, which is the largest factor contributing to committing domestic violence as an adult.

Mothers are substantially more likely to hit children, due to their increased childcare responsibilities. Further, studies conclusively show that boys get hit more often and more severely than girls.

As a long-term trend, since nationally-represented data was being measured (in 1975, 1985, 1992, and

1995), there has been a decrease in overall domestic assaults. However, if you look at the data by gender, nearly all of the decrease is in partner violence rates by men - while partner violence rates by women have remained the same. This demonstrates that the efforts of the women's movement to raise awareness and prevent domestic assaults by men have been working, and that efforts need to be made to address assaults by women.

Dr. Straus has never been invited to speak at any of the NH Attorney General's annual domestic violence conferences, nor has he ever been invited to speak before any of the member organization of the NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

At one point during Dr. Straus' testimony, Lee Newman from SAFE-NH wished to ask a question of Dr. Straus. David Lauren opposed this and felt that questioning should be limited to members of the Commission. Marshall Hickok moved to allow Lee to ask his question, which was seconded by Mike Geanoulis. The motion passed 4-1, with David Lauren opposed.

During Lee's dialogue with Dr. Straus, Lee mentioned that the one of the provisions in the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) requires that services be provided by organizations that are members of state domestic violence coalitions, and that SAFE-NH has been excluded from joining the NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. David Lauren questioned this statement and Lee noted that SAFE-NH had voluntarily withdrawn its membership application request from the Coalition after 2.5 years of repeated attempts to obtain application materials from them.

Scott Garman will follow-up after the meeting to ask Dr. Straus for the following information:

1. The revised slides from the presentation "Dominance and Symmetry in Partner Violence by Male and Female University Students in 32 Nations."
2. The FBI sources from his comment that approx. 1/3 of nationwide domestic violence fatalities are perpetrated by women.
3. A listing of the questions asked in his partner violence surveys.

Secretary's Report

Scott Garman distributed a draft copy of the May meeting minutes, as well as a proposed amendment from Joe Mastromarino. Joe requested that the addendum be included in the section titled, "The CSM's Mission, Chair's Comments." Marshall Hickok moved to accept the minutes with this amendment, David Lauren seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Scott noted that no changes to the Commission's web site were made other than normal approved

minutes additions and meeting calendar updates. He also mentioned that the next web site update will include an audio MP3 file recording of Dr. Straus' testimony, with his permission.

Education Committee Report

David Lauren reported that he spoke with Elaine Holden, who runs The Reading Foundation in Amherst, NH. This is a private tutoring program for students with learning and reading disabilities. Ms. Holden is available to speak with the Commission on the topic of boys in special education during our July meeting.

A general discussion was held on meeting scheduling issues, and the fact that Judge Gerry Boyle was invited to speak during the July meeting. Everyone present agreed that both speakers would be given allotments of time to speak and that the meeting would be focused on hearing their testimony, and limiting other agenda items.

Joe will make final arrangements with David and Marshall to co-ordinate the guest speakers for July's meeting.

Scott Garman then presented new UNH/Durham enrollment statistics for undergraduate, graduate, and associate degree students from Spring 2005-Spring 2006. The data shows no significant changes in the enrollment rates of males and females, with undergraduate male rates hovering at approximately 42%. Scott also noted that for the most recent semester, Spring 2006, that male graduate student enrollment was the lowest percentage he had seen so far, at 38.8%.

Domestic Violence Conference:

David Lauren and guest Lee Newman both attended the Waterville Valley domestic violence conference last month and reported on their experiences.

David noted that the conference was well-attended by men and that one keynote speech included a man talking about abuse he survived as a child. David felt that the conference was very professionally done and the breakout sessions were valuable. One disappointment he did find was that not many judges appeared to be in attendance.

Mike Geanoulis asked David if there were any presentations at the conference about female abusers, and David was not aware of any.

Lee Newman reported that he was disappointed with the lack of presentations that made reference to male victims of domestic violence. He recalled a couple of instances where domestic violence against homosexual men was covered, but none for heterosexual male victims. Lee made a few contacts with

individuals that appreciated SAFE-NH's presence, but by and large he felt his presence was more begrudgingly tolerated than openly welcomed. Lee also confirmed that no workshops at the event covered violence against men by women. He will submit to the Commission a list of all the workshop titles as a demonstration of the degree of bias in the conference.

The topic then turned to domestic violence restraining orders, and Lee Newman noted that a lot of men he's worked with tend to get run-down by the system and are willing to let the restraining order take hold because of a sense of futility about the process. Many of these men feel that the deck is stacked against them and that the restraining order will help serve the purpose of keeping distance between them and their partner, and aren't realizing the longer-term consequences of a guilty plea.

Marshall Hickok discussed the legal mechanics of the restraining order system and noted that a specific constituency of men feels very strongly that there needs to be some sort of reform, accountability, or raising of the standards of evidence in order to reduce the prevalence of restraining orders that are abused.

Treasurer's Report:

David Lauren reported that a donation check from the NH Chapter of the National Congress for Fathers and Children he received from Michael Geanoulis was deposited into the Commission's bank account.

Commission Membership with the NH Children's Alliance:

Joe Mastromarino noted that he hasn't heard anything new regarding the Commission's status of becoming a member organization of the NH Children's Alliance. He will get in touch with Steve Gorin by e-mail to follow-up on this in the hopes of receiving a status report regarding it next month.