

AMERICA IS FACING A TEST of its determination to confront domestic violence. Two tests, really: one, a court case; the other, a piece of federal legislation, each signaling in its own way whether the struggle to ensure women's safety is advancing or in retreat. That struggle—which is as old as Carrie Nation—has made great strides over the last three decades. Domestic violence has been acknowledged and defined, recognized in law, and countered with programs ranging from counseling to shelters to hot lines to enforcement training and judicial reform. As a result, the overall incidence of women being battered or killed by intimate partners has declined or leveled off.

Still, as many as 4 million women are assaulted by spouses or partners each year, and 1,200 are killed. Clearly, the fight is not over.

It certainly isn't over for Jessica Gonzales, who in June lost her case, *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, before the U.S. Supreme Court. One day in 1999, Gonzales's estranged husband abducted their three daughters from her front yard and murdered them, a carnage that might have been prevented had the Castle Rock, Colorado, police department not repeatedly refused to act on the protective order she'd sworn out. Gonzales sued the town for its negligence; when her case reached the Supreme Court, the Bush administration weighed in on Castle Rock's side. The arguments were technical legal dissections; left hanging was any consideration of the mayhem an adverse court decision could introduce into many women's lives. After the court's ruling favoring Castle Rock, advocates fear a future where restraining orders, standard protection sought by thousands of women each year, will ring hollow, leaving abused women with even less legal support.

That was one test. The second will come when Congress deliberates the renewal of the 10-year-old Violence Against Women Act, which will expire on September 30. Advocates of the successful and popular legislation hope it will be buttressed with enhanced funding but fear its support will be cut.

These decisions have enormous ramifications for women and the advocates battling for their safety. Judging from the casualties, the battle remains to be won.

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SOURCES:

RANK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS IN 44 PERCENT OF CITIES SURVEYED:

SOURCE: U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, A STATUS REPORT ON HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA'S CITIES: A 25-CITY SURVEY, DECEMBER 2003.

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FACTOR BY WHICH CHILDREN OF AN ABUSED PARENT ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ABUSED THEMSELVES:

SOURCE: "DOMESTIC VIOLENCE." ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (ACF), 2001

2

PERCENTAGE OF ALL DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS WHO ARE MEN:

SOURCE: "INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, 1993-2001." BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, 2003.

15

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UNDER 18 WHO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITHIN THREE MONTHS OF THEIR CHILD'S BIRTH:

SOURCE: FAMILY PLANNING PERSPECTIVES, ALAN GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE, 1999.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN TREATED IN EMERGENCY ROOMS FOR VIOLENT INJURIES WHO WERE HURT BY A CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER:

SOURCE: "VIOLENCE RELATED INJURIES TREATED IN HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS." US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, AUGUST 1997.

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PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN MURDERED BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER WHO VISITED AN EMERGENCY ROOM IN THE TWO YEARS PRIOR TO THEIR DEATHS:

SOURCE: "PREDICTING FUTURE INJURY AMONG WOMEN IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS." THE JOURNAL OF TRAUMA INJURY, INFECTION, AND CRITICAL CARE, 2004.

44

NUMBER OF WOMEN KILLED BY DOMESTIC PARTNERS EACH YEAR:

SOURCE: BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, 2002. WWW.OJP.USDOJ.GOV/BJS/HOMICIDE/INTIMATES.HTM

1,200

NUMBER OF CALLS TO THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE SINCE 1996:

1,000,000

SOURCE: NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE. WWW.NDVH.ORG/ABOUT.HTML

AMOUNT BY WHICH FEDERAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERVICES PROGRAMS WERE UNDER FUNDED IN 2005:

\$48,000,000

SOURCE: CAMPAIGN FOR FUNDING TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. FY 2006 BUDGET BRIEFING BOOK. WWW.NCADV.ORG/FILES/COMPILEDBRIEFINGBOOKANDCHARTSFY06.PDF

ANNUAL HEALTH RELATED COSTS, LOST PRODUCTIVITY COSTS, AND LOST EARNINGS DUE TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE :

\$5,900,000,000

SOURCE: "COSTS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES." NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, 2003.

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