

9/11 and Domestic Violence

This is nothing that others haven't said before. I've been educated about this issue by feminist women, who have written about spending priorities long before I ever did. So here I am, saying it again on the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

My thanks to Patty Branco and the wonderful folks at the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, www.nrcdv.org. Big thanks to all the feminist women who have taught me so much over the years.

By Ben Atherton-Zeman

September 9, 2011

Both 9/11 and domestic murders have claimed thousands of lives. Over 3,000 victims were killed in the September 11 attacks – about 2,000 victims / year are killed in the United States by their intimate partners.

Both were results of terrorist attacks – 9/11 from Al Qaeda, domestic murder from “domestic terrorists.” Both kinds of terrorists use fear, violence and intimidation to get what they want. But Al Qaeda terrorists are vilified, while domestic terrorists are often called “pillars of the community.”

Our country's response to each has been completely different. We responded to 9/11 with the war in Iraq – hundreds of billions of dollars. We responded to domestic murder with funding the Violence Against Women Act and other federal legislation – hundreds of millions of dollars.

Why the disparity?

What's the difference between the victims of 9/11 and the victims of domestic murder?

One is gender – many more men kill their wives and girlfriends than vice versa.

But I think the main reason for the disparity is victim-blaming.

Nobody blames folks for going to work in the Twin Towers that day. But every day, people blame the victims of domestic abuse for the violence perpetrated against them. People say, “I wouldn't let anybody do that to me,” not realizing the implication of blame for those who stay with abusive spouses and partners. People ask, “Why doesn't she leave?” instead of “Why is he abusing her?” and “What can we do to help?”

I've had the honor of knowing people who responded to each. Ground Zero workers, people in the United States military who fought on behalf of our country. Advocates for domestic violence survivors, volunteers and staff at shelters for battered women. All heroes – all underpaid and overworked.

As the 10th anniversary of 9/11 arrives, our country will honor those who lost their lives on that day. We will honor those who worked at Ground Zero afterward. We will honor those who are serving in uniform.

But let us also take this opportunity to realize that we've spent 1/1000th of our country's resources on stopping domestic violence, than we have on the war in Iraq. Let us question why these victims of intimate terrorism get less sympathy than the victims of Al Qaeda terrorism. Let us honor advocates for victims of domestic violence, just as we honor our women and men in uniform.