

# ***DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE (Rochester, NY)***

**Op/Ed — March 18, 2004**

## ***Broken Bonds: Most Violent Crimes Against Women and Girls Are Acts of Betrayal***

By Hank Shaw

These days everyone understands the threat of international terrorism. Yet we continue to overlook another form of terrorism that hits home in every country: violence against women and girls.

We see the disturbing headlines almost every day. A Penfield lawyer is charged with arranging the murder of his wife. A father in Syracuse is charged with raping his daughter. A girl living near Coney Island has to kill her father when he attacks her and her mother with a bat.

At the University of Colorado at Boulder, a former kicker named Katie Hnida says she was assaulted and harassed by teammates. In Washington State, an investigative report finds that in the past decade more than 150 coaches have been disciplined for sexual harassment or assaults against athletes, most of them girls. Meanwhile, hundreds of servicewomen report that they have been assaulted by other members of the U.S. armed forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Pacific region, Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas and at the Air Force Academy in Colorado.

There's a common thread to all of these stories. The men who committed these crimes all betrayed women and girls who were members of their families, organizations or "teams."

Of course, these sorry acts are just a few isolated examples of a global crime wave against women and girls.

Today, sex trafficking — often a euphemism for slavery — is a booming business. There are mass rapes of women and girls in virtually every war zone. Misogynists burn down girls' schools in Afghanistan. AIDS is taking an increasing toll on women and girls, because a lot of sick guys can't be bothered to put on a condom. In our own country, almost 700,000 women are forcibly raped every year, including thousands of girls who aren't even old enough for the first grade.

And remember. We haven't even talked about the number one crime against women and girls — domestic violence — which takes its toll on millions and millions of people every year.

Each of these crimes is horrendous in itself. But when you put them together, the problem of gender violence reaches Himalayan proportions. And guess who the perpetrators are? Forget stranger danger. In the vast majority of cases, women and girls are being assaulted and abused by guys they know, just like Katie Hnida and the servicewomen in Iraq.

In other words, the men who commit these crimes are betraying coworkers, fellow students, team members, friends, neighbors and family members. In a time of war, they're betraying soldiers who wear the same uniform. Which is a traitorous act.

Let's face it. This is a sick situation. But it's not like the weather: We CAN do something about it.

The first step is to get more men to take this problem seriously. After all, these crimes directly impact the lives of our mothers, sisters, daughters and friends.

The next step is to get more men actively involved in ending the violence. In fact, men have to take the lead. Why? It's simple. Men have a much better chance of changing the mindset of men and boys who are liable to commit discriminatory acts of gender violence. After all, those guys aren't likely to take advice from women, are they?

What can men do? We can challenge acts of violence and misogyny when we hear them or see them. We can become role models in our treatment of women and girls. We can support organizations that help the victims of male violence. We can also make a valuable contribution to the cause simply by talking about issues related to gender violence to other men and boys.

If we get enough conversations going, these man-to-man talks could help launch one of the most economical violence prevention programs in history. They could change the world one man's mind at a time. And they don't have to be long-winded or heavy-handed. All we have to do is get more men to take to heart a few reasonable concepts:

Guys don't have the right to harm women and girls or force them to have sex. Equality isn't a club for men. And the women and girls in our lives aren't wearing a different uniform. They're really members of our own team.

If we get this sensible message across, we will protect more women and girls from acts of violence. And one day we may even be able to end the global crime wave of gender violence. Considering the size of the problem today, that could be one of the shining achievements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Hank Shaw is the author of two publications designed to educate men about violence against women and girls in North America and around the world: "It's Time For Guys To Put An End To This" and "Rated XX for Violence Against Women and Girls." He can be contacted at [Time4guys@aol.com](mailto:Time4guys@aol.com)*

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