

# ***Portland Press Herald*** (Maine)

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## **Drop in Domestic Violence No Reason to Reduce Efforts**

***Society should continue to insist that any amount of spousal abuse is too much.***

Like child abuse and alcoholism, domestic violence is one of those pernicious social ills that bridge generations and defies solutions.

In Maine, the abuse of one partner by another takes an especially tragic toll: About 40 percent of homicides in the state result from an escalation of violent behavior that springs from a relationship gone bad.

So news that a national survey suggests a significant, ongoing decline in spousal abuse is a welcome development.

Each year, the National Crime Victimization Survey assesses the level of abuse against spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends and former partners. This year's results are based on interviews with residents of 77,200 households across the country. It's the most widely used mechanism for tracking this intensely personal and private problem.

Through interviews, the group also tries to estimate abuse that isn't reported to police: the slaps that don't leave marks, the arguments not loud enough to alert the neighbors, threats not threatening enough to prompt action.

The study suggests the overall level of domestic violence is now as low as it has been since 1973.

Officials say that it's impossible to identify a specific cause of the apparent decline. They note the trend appeared after the 1994 launch of major government efforts at the state and federal level to provide women more options to seek safety.

The increase in the number of working women with independent incomes makes it easier for them to escape an abusive situation. Public education campaigns have encouraged more women to speak up when they develop concerns. Laws that require police to make an arrest when domestic violence is reported may have also helped.

Yet far too many women still live their lives in fear. The battle isn't over yet.

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