

May 27, 2004, Vol. 10, Issue 9

Speaking Up is a project of the Family Violence Prevention Fund. Produced by PR Solutions, Inc., Washington, DC. Phone: 202/371-1999; Fax: 202/371-9142; E-mail: speakingup@prsolutionsdc.com.

Filing for a Protection Order Decreases Violence

A study of 150 women in Houston, Texas finds that abused women who apply for a two-year protection order report lower levels of violence after they apply, whether or not the order is granted. The study was reported in the April issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The study included black, Hispanic and white women and was conducted from January 2001 to June 2002 at a family violence unit of the Houston District Attorney's office. Authors are: Judith McFarlane, DrPH, Ann Malecha, PhD and Julie Gist, PhD of the College of Nursing at Texas Woman's University; Kathy Watson, MS of the Baylor College of Medicine; Elizabeth Batten, BA of the Harris County District Attorney's Office, Family Criminal Law Division; and Iva Hall, PhD and Sheila Smith, PhD of the Nursing Department of Lamar University.

Of the 150 participants, 81 women were granted a protection order and 69 women were not. Forty of those who were not granted a protection order dropped the request before their court dates. However, both groups reported lower levels of intimate partner violence, including worksite harassment, when they applied for the protection order, as well as during the subsequent three-, six-, twelve- and 18-month periods.

Results are consistent with other studies, showing that "When an abused woman decides to contact a criminal justice, civil justice, health or social service agency, information about the abuse is shared and contact is made," the authors write. "Just as the privatization of domestic violence contributes to its continuation, perhaps the contact and public knowledge stemming from justice encounters can prevent reoccurrence of violence."

The Houston study cites an earlier qualitative study in which women discuss using the application for a protection order as a "loudspeaker" to notify the abuser that the legal system knows about his behavior.