



Empowering Youth to End
Domestic Violence

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
REAUTHORIZATION OF THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF:
Juley Fulcher & Victoria Sadler
Break the Cycle Washington, DC
P.O. Box 21034
Washington, DC 20009
202.654.4039

*I know what it is to be scared every second you exist, to be able to predict if someone is going to hurt you based on the expression on their face, to wash away your own blood every day, and to make peace with death. I am only 21. I met my first love when I was 13 and we dated until I was 20. After I started college, things began to change. Rather than end what had become an unhealthy relationship, we spent more time together. One night we began to argue and he pushed me into a wooden table. In shock and fear, I followed him to his car. We were still for almost a minute, when without a word he grabbed the side of my face and smashed it into the passenger-side window. The pain was horrible and I held my breath until we had driven out of the parking lot, and then I cried like never before. Following this, the violence became easier for him and more confusing for me. I was being punched, slapped, strangled, and kicked. He bit me, broke one of my fingers, and chipped my teeth. He gave me six black eyes in three months. It turned into a whirlwind of pain, mass confusion, denial, and the sensation of trying to climb out of a wet, muddy hole. **While experiencing abuse, you are unsure of what to do, where to go or how to get out.***

- Veronica, age 21, Los Angeles, CA

The youth of our nation are facing an epidemic of monumental proportions, and they don't know what to do, where to go or how to get out. Many don't even know they should get out. And yet, they are the ones most often faced with unhealthy, violent relationships. The Department of Justice consistently finds that girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience

the highest rate of nonfatal intimate partner violence.¹ The group that most often encounters dating violence lacks answers, resources, and knowledge to end this epidemic while the generation that is supposed to lead them into adulthood stands by, usually unaware of the problem. However, we can no longer afford to pretend dating violence and sexual assault only affects adults. Now is the time to tell the youth of our nation that we are done pretending, that we will lead them into healthy adulthoods, that we won't tolerate violence and neither should they. Now is the time to support the Violence Against Women Act of 2005.

Break the Cycle, Washington, DC is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to engage, educate, and empower youth to build lives and communities free from dating and domestic violence. We accomplish this goal by providing preventive education, free legal services, advocacy and support to young people between the ages of 12 and 22. Break the Cycle faces young people scarred by domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking daily and, as such, we support S. 1197 as an essential step in ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking for children and youth throughout our nation.

The Violence Against Women Acts of 1994 and 2000 as First Steps in Ending Violence

The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) was a momentous step forward for our nation. With its passage, the nation and the federal government finally acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence exists and affects the lives of millions of Americans. For the first time, resources were channeled into helping victims of such violence. VAWA established the National Domestic Violence Hotline, funded training sessions for police, prosecutors and court officials, and established new federal crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking to fill in jurisdictional gaps in prosecuting these crimes. It provided federal guarantees for Full Faith and Credit (enforcement and recognition of protection orders across state and jurisdictional lines). This landmark legislation that sought to improve criminal justice and community-based responses has affected many programs and communities ranging from domestic violence shelters to campus sexual assault studies to teaching police to uphold protection orders.

¹ Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Intimate Partner Violence and Ages of Victim, 1993-1999." Oct. 2001.

Based on the overwhelming success of VAWA, Congress reauthorized it in 2000, thereby continuing to combat domestic and sexual violence by financing services across the nation and adding crucial services for immigrant, rural, disabled and older women. It also recognized that the pattern of domestic violence extends to dating relationships.² Since its inception, VAWA has successfully helped millions of Americans while being cost effective for the nation.³ On September 30, 2005, VAWA expires and with it fades the hopes of many Americans who rely on its programs to escape abusive relationship.

While many families would not have been helped without VAWA, the previous Acts have only been first steps in ending domestic and sexual violence in our nation. The Violence Against Women Acts of 1994 and 2000 focused predominately on violence against adult women. While it has worked effectively to improve services and responses to adult victims, youth and young adults have, unfortunately, been forgotten.

Violence Against Children and Youth: The Problem

Becoming an adult has never been an easy process. Over the years, the nation has recognized the unique needs of this age group that lingers in limbo somewhere between childhood and adulthood. Twelve to twenty-four year olds have many services tailored towards them ranging from doctors who specialize in adolescent care to teen formation and youth ministry in churches to Alateen programs aimed at helping teens deal with alcoholic parents to out-of-school work programs. In so many areas we acknowledge that this age group faces unique problems. However when it comes to dating violence and sexual assault, we largely ignore them.

Dating Violence

My name is José, and my story begins when my girlfriend and I broke up. When I first broke up with her, I was ready to move on because after all, we were only together a few months. A couple of weeks after I ended things with her, she started calling me at my job. I notified my supervisor of the situation and they

² 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-2 (2005).

³ Clark, K., Biddle, A., and Martin, S., "A Cost- Benefit Analysis of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994," *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 417-428 (2002). VAWA 1994 cost the nation \$1.5 billion over 5 years, but saved the nation \$14.8 billion in medical expenses, lost wages, lowered worker productivity, police response, victim services, property losses, emergency shelter costs, reduced quality of life, and mental health treatment. The price tag of VAWA each year is billions cheaper.

changed my phone number, but somehow she was able to get the new number as well. She started leaving notes on my car and at my new girlfriend's house, threatening her and begging me to get back with her. At that point, I decided to call the police. When the police got to my house and read the notes, they told me that the notes were annoying but not criminal. The officers advised me to get a restraining order against her because then her harassing notes and calls would be considered criminal. I didn't have a clue how to even begin the process of obtaining a restraining order.

- José, age 22, Los Angeles, CA

Dating violence affects both females and males in heterosexual and homosexual relationships. It affects all races and nationalities, all religions and all neighborhoods. Dating violence is pattern of behaviors in a dating relationship that is physically, sexually, verbally, and/or emotionally abusive. It is usually not a one-time incident, but instead a pattern of abusive incidents that causes fear and/or harm. Fourteen states do not include dating relationships in their definition of domestic violence even though one study of 13 to 18 year olds showed that one in every three teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, or physically hurt by their partner.⁴ That's just the physical violence. The numbers for verbal and emotional abuse are even more staggering. Eighty percent of teens regard verbal abuse as a serious issue for their age group.⁵ More than half of the girls in this study know a friend who has been verbally abused or threatened, as have one third of the boys.⁶

Dating violence is not isolated to a particular region of the country. In 2003, the Center for Disease Control reported results of a study of the percentage of high school students who experienced being hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend: over 12 percent of females and 11 percent of males in Chicago, IL; 14 percent of females and 12 percent of males in Dallas, TX; nearly 17 percent of females and 15 percent of males in the District of Columbia; over 11 percent of females and over 12 percent of males in Milwaukee, WI; and, nearly 10 percent of females and 12 percent of males in San Diego, CA.⁷ These numbers should probably be even higher based on the fact that teens often do not report violence.

⁴ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

⁵ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

⁶ Id.

⁷ "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2003," *Surveillance Summaries*, 53(SS02);1-96 (May 21, 2004). <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5302a1.htm#tab10>. In Arizona, 7.2% of girls and 8.1% of boys experienced dating violence. In Oklahoma, 9.1% of girls and 9.9% of boys. In Philadelphia, 13% of girls and 17.3% of boys. In Boston, 10.1% of girls and 11% of boys. In New York, 6.9% of girls and 7.8% of boys.

Dating violence affects this age group more than it affects adults in relationships. Teens aged 16 to 19 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence—almost three times that experienced, on average, by all women as a group.⁸ As many as one third of teenage girls report having had a boyfriend who was physically violent towards them.⁹ Many teens are dating for the first time¹⁰ and unsure of the barriers between a healthy relationship and an abusive one. In fact, 25 to 30 percent of teens equate jealousy, possessiveness, and violence with love.¹¹ Teens must be taught that these are signs of an unhealthy relationship.

Sexual Violence

As a 15-year old victim of abuse, I did not know what I could do to feel safe and happy again. My abuser sexually assaulted me, grabbing me and touching me inappropriately. I was too scared to tell my parents because I did not want to burden them. I felt dirty and shameful. Silence seemed like my only option, yet it was not a solution that would give me my life back.

- Angela, age 17, San Francisco, CA

Silence should not be the only option for victims of sexual violence. In fact, silence shifts the burden of guilt from the abuser to the victim. The victim is left with the scar, the abuser walks away free. In one study, one quarter of teen girls who had been in a romantic relationship admitted that they had been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse when they didn't want to.¹² Seventy percent of sexual assaults reported by adolescent and college-aged women were date rapes; more than one third of these assaulted women were between 14 and 17 years old.¹³

Sexual abuse is any sexual behavior that is unwanted and which interferes with the victim's right to say no to sexual advances. Sexual abuse includes unwanted touching or kissing, date rape, forcing the victim to do some sexual act, and refusing to allow the victim to use either birth

⁸ In 1999, 15.4 16-24 year olds out of 1000 were abused while the rate for women in general was 5.8. Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-1999." NCJ 187635: Oct. 2001, 3.

⁹ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. 1997. Teen Dating Violence Resource Manual. (p. 17). Denver, CO: NCADV.

¹⁰ Two out of three 13 to 18 year olds—regardless of gender—have been in a relationship, dated or "hooked up." Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

¹¹ Reaching and Teaching Teens, NDVSAC, 1996.

¹² Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

¹³ B. Levy, *Dating Violence*, (Seattle: Seal Press, 1991), 9.

control or protection against STDs. Unfortunately, many teens do not know what sexual abuse is or that they have the right to say no. Forty-four percent of teens believed that if a girl and guy have been drinking and are a little bit drunk, then it is not sexual assault if he forces or coerces her to have sex.¹⁴ Nearly half of teens believed that if a girl says yes to sex and then changes her mind and the guy has sex with her anyway, it is not sexual assault.¹⁵ These are two situations we can directly change with education. We must educate our youth of the meaning of sexual assault and remind them that they never have to do anything, whether they started already or are under the influence.

Nearly two million of the 22.3 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States have been victims of serious sexual assault.¹⁶ Additionally, in one year, over 4,000 incidents of rape and sexual assault occurred in public schools across the country.¹⁷ Those incidents were at school, breaking down the hope that schools can be safe places for teens. In the Center for Disease Control study of high school students who were physically forced to have sexual intercourse, 13 percent of female students in DeKalb County public schools in Georgia, over 14 percent of female students in District of Columbia public schools, and over 14 percent of female students in the Philadelphia school district reported being forced to have intercourse.¹⁸ Again, these percentages only represent the number of female students who reported the forced sexual intercourse; it is most definitely an under representation of the reality teenage girls face. Males in high school, too, face forced sexual intercourse. In Alabama, Idaho, Oklahoma, and Utah, where the percentage of females who are forced ranges from 11 to nearly 16 percent of high school students, males range from 4.5 to 7 percent.¹⁹ Males are even more unlikely to report forced sexual intercourse.

¹⁴ *Attitude and Behavior Assessment Among Wisconsin High School Students*, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault Media Campaign, Nov. 2000.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Kilpatrick, Dean, and Saunders, Benjamin. "The Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization," April 1997, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education, 1997. (The number of rape and sexual assaults in schools is no longer captured/reported by the Dept of Education as a separate group. All rapes and sexual assaults are categorized with other violent crimes.)

¹⁸ "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2003," *Surveillance Summaries*, 53(SS02);1-96 (May 21, 2004). <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5302a1.htm#tab10>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

Repercussions for the Victim and Community

Dating violence and sexual assaults can be emotionally and physically painful for its victims.

The pain does not end when the violent incident or cycle of incidents ends. In fact, the pain and repercussions can continue and change the victim's life in countless ways.

1. The plague of insecurity and isolation

At the age of 13, I was insecure, trying to find my place in the world, to discover the person I would become. My insecurity allowed for many things: low self-esteem, hatred of my appearance, and worst of all, abuse by my boyfriend. Though I knew abuse was wrong, I told myself that my situation was different because my boyfriend needed to hit me to get through his problems. I forced myself to believe that I was helping him by letting him hurt me. I hated myself because his words made me feel inadequate—as a girlfriend and as a human being. I was incapable of reaching out to anyone because I couldn't see my situation as important. I couldn't see myself as important.

- Jean, age 20, New York, NY

I am an honors student with a supportive family and close friendships. When the person I loved struck me, I couldn't believe it happened to me. I met my ex-boyfriend my freshman year in college. Soon after, we became inseparable and he became abusive. He screened my friends and told me who was acceptable. No one was good enough. The verbal and emotional abuse was devastating. He lashed out and kicked me in the leg. I never understood his behavior. He would hit me and then pull away saying, "I've never done this to anyone. I don't beat women." I wondered whether there was something wrong with me.

- Erika, age 19, Washington, DC

The teenage years are filled with natural insecurity as one's body changes, and the transition to adulthood is filled with new types of relationships, more responsibilities and new possibilities. Because of this, teenagers must be taught what is healthy and what is not and services must be offered to help them through this transition. Abuse feeds off of this insecurity and creates even more. Being in a new relationship can make young people feel good about themselves, worthy of being loved. But, experiencing abuse and violence in that relationship can do the opposite, making a young person feel as if they brought on the violence, like there was something they did to cause it. Moreover, as many as 18 percent of 13 to 18 year olds said a partner had threatened

harm to themselves if presented with a break-up.²⁰ So, the victim becomes trapped, fearing they would be responsible if their batterer committed self-harm. Abusers often actively try to shift blame for the abuse onto the victim. They become convinced it is their fault, and they become stuck in the very relationship that is so drastically hurting them.

2. Risky Behavior

As teen victims turn inward trying to figure out what is wrong with them to cause the abuse, many pull away from family and friends. Teens and young adults who are disconnected from social supports such as school, family and work are at particular risk for dating and sexual violence. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety and violence toward peers.²¹ They are also more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, runaway from home, engage in teenage prostitution and commit sexual assault crimes.²² In fact, girls that report being physically and/or sexually abused are in most cases more than twice as likely to report smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs.²³

Teenagers with a history of sexual abuse are significantly more likely than their counterparts to engage in sexual behavior that puts them at risk for HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.²⁴ They are also more likely to have their first intercourse before the age of 15, have multiple partners, and not use condoms.²⁵ By being abused at no fault of their own, victims develop risky behaviors that put themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases that could forever alter their lives.

²⁰ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

²¹ Jaffe, P. and Sudermann, M., "Child Witness to Women Abuse: Research and Community Responses," in Stith, S. and Straus, M., *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalences, Causes, Consequences, and Solutions. Families in Focus Services*, Vol. II. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations, 1995.

²² Wolfe, D.A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel, D. and Gough, R., "Strategies to Address Violence in the Lives of High Risk Youth." In Peled, E. Jaffe, P.D. and Edleson, J.L. (eds), *Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*. New York: Sage Publications, 1995.

²³ The Facts on Teenagers and Intimate Partner Violence, Family Violence Prevention Fund. www.endabuse.org. Smoking: 26% of abused compared to 10% of non-abused. Drinking: 22% compared to 12%. Using illegal drugs: 30% compared to 13%.

²⁴ Sexual Abuse Statistics, <http://prevent-abuse-now.com/stats.htm#child>

²⁵ Jay Silverman, et. al., *Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality*, 286 JAMA 572, 2001.

3. Consequences to Health

Being a victim of dating violence leads to many health problems. Weight control behaviors are more and more common amongst teenagers; however, a victim's risk of having weight control behaviors increases with dating violence. Thirty-two percent of girls who had been abused reported bingeing and purging, compared to 12 percent of girls who had not been abused.²⁶ Additionally, children exposed to violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as nightmares, and were at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu.²⁷ Women who are abused are also more likely to be diagnosed with migraines, chronic pain, arthritis, and high blood pressure²⁸ and three times more likely to have a gynecological problem including chronic pelvic pain, vaginal bleeding, vaginal infection, painful menstruation, sexual dysfunction, fibroids, pelvic inflammatory disease, painful intercourse, urinary tract infection and infertility.²⁹ These changes to a victim's health could affect his or her lifetime wellness and possibly even shorten life.

Although not directly a detriment to one's health, pregnancy can place a toll on one's body, especially if young. In a study of young mothers aged 12 to 18, one out of every eight pregnant adolescents reported having been physically assaulted by the father of her baby during the preceding 12 months.³⁰ Two-thirds of the young mothers that reported such abuse also reported that their boyfriends sabotaged their birth control efforts either by words or behavior.³¹ Many young women who are victims of domestic violence experience birth control sabotage by their abusive partners. One study found that 66 percent of abused women had experienced birth

²⁶ Schoen, C., Davis, K., Collins, K., Greenberg, L., Des Roches, C., Abrams, M., *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. The Commonwealth Fund. New York, NY. 1997.

²⁷ Graham-Bermann, Sandra A. and Julie Seng, "Violence Exposure and Traumatic Stress Symptoms as Additional Predictors of Health Problems in High-Risk Children," *Journal of Pediatrics*. 146(3):309-10 (2001).

²⁸ Graffunder, C.M., Noonan, R., Cox, P., and Wheaton, J., "Through a Public Health Lens, Preventing Violence Against Women: An Update from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," *Journal of Women's Health*, vol. 13, 5-16(2004).

²⁹ "Violence Against Women: Effects on Reproductive Health," *Outlook*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Sept. 2002.

³⁰ Wiemann, C., Aguarca, C., Berenson, A., Richert, V., "Pregnant Adolescents: Experiences and Behaviors Associated with Physical Assault by an Intimate Partner," *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 93-101 (2000).

³¹ www.center4research.org/v-dating.html

control sabotage.³² Once pregnant, an abused woman has significantly higher risk of complications including low weight gain, anemia, infections, and first and second trimester bleeding.³³

When I was 15, I met the man of my dreams. He was 23, sweet, understanding and respectful. After a year, I felt physically and emotionally ready to take our relationship to the next level. When I found out I was pregnant, I was happy and excited, in love. When I was six months pregnant, he pressured me into moving in with him. Soon after, I noticed he was changing toward me. He started to ignore me and drink heavily. When we argued, he would slap or punch me and because of this, I had problems during labor and had to have a Cesarean to deliver. On August 23, 1999, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. As soon as I got home, my boyfriend told me to clean the house. When I refused, he pulled me by my hair into the room and made me clean it. This was only the beginning. He said that he would take my daughter away if I left him. He forced himself on me and left marks on me so other guys would know I was "taken." One day, he even dragged me into the street half-naked and left me there while my daughter yelled, "Mommy, Mommy," from inside. I begged him to stop, not for me but for the baby.

- Maria, age 17, Los Angeles, CA

Young mothers are particularly vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence, with one study finding that 26 percent of new mothers between the ages of 13 and 17 experienced such violence in the three months after the birth of their child.³⁴ The abuse is prevalent at all stages of pregnancy. No fewer than a quarter of teen mothers experience intimate partner violence before, during, or just after their pregnancy, with some studies reporting rates of 50 to 80 percent.³⁵ Intimate partner violence is an onerous problem for pregnant youth while intimate partner violence is linked to adolescent pregnancy. As many as two thirds of young women who become pregnant as adolescents were sexually or physically abused at some point in their lives.³⁶

³² *Domestic Violence and Birth Control Sabotage: A Report from the Teen Parent Project.* Center for Impact Research. Chicago, IL. 2000. www.impactresearch.org/documents/dvandbirthcontrol.pdf

³³ Parker, B., McFarlane, J., and Soeken, K., "Abuse During Pregnancy: Effects on Maternal Complications and Infant Birthweight in Adult and Teen Women," *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 84(1): 323-28(1994).

³⁴ Allen Guttmacher Institute, "Nearly 10% of Teenage Mothers Experience Violence While Pregnant," *FamilyPlanning Perspectives*. 31(2): 106 (1999).

³⁵ Leidermann, Sally and Cair Almo, *Interpersonal Violence and Adolescent Pregnancy: Prevalence and Implications for Practice and Policy.* Center for Assessment and Policy Development and the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention. 2001.

³⁶ Leidermann, Sally and Cair Almo, *Interpersonal Violence and Adolescent Pregnancy: Prevalence and Implications for Practice and Policy.* Center for Assessment and Policy Development and the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention. 2001.

And if a woman's pregnancy is unplanned, she is two to four times more likely to be abused during the pregnancy than a woman who planned the pregnancy.³⁷

4. Juvenile Delinquency

In addition to psychological changes and changes to health, abused teens may fall into situations that prevent them from becoming successful, independent adults. Youth that either witness or experience domestic or dating violence have higher probabilities of truancy, poor school performance, and trouble concentrating and may have difficulty retaining employment.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, several thousand rapes and sexual assaults occur each year in public schools. With 42 percent of boys and 43 percent of girls aged 13 to 18 reporting that their abuse took place either in a school building or on school grounds³⁹ it is not a surprise that victims either do not show up to school or have trouble performing once there.

Despite the overall decrease in juvenile crime over the past ten years, there has been a quickly growing increase in the number of female juvenile offenders. Between 1989 and 1998, female juvenile delinquency increased by 83 percent.⁴⁰ Estimates show that a large percentage of girls in the juvenile justice system have been victims of prior sexual and physical abuse as compared to the general juvenile population. Such abuse is consistently recognized as the first step in a girl's pathway into the system. About 26 percent of teenage girls in grades 9 through 12 in the general population have been victims of physical abuse, sexual assault or date rape.⁴¹ In comparison, according to surveys taken of girls in detention, about 92% of female juvenile offenders say that they had been a victim of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse before entering the juvenile justice system.⁴² As victims of violence, these girls are more likely to engage in risky activities and are increasingly becoming violent against either their abusers or against other

³⁷ Rabasca, Lisa. "More Research in Needed on Violence and Reproduction," *American Psychological Association Monitor*, Vol. 30, No. 8, Sept. 8, 1999.

³⁸ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

³⁹ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

⁴⁰ Biden, Joseph R. *What about the Girls? The Role of the Federal Government in Addressing the Rise in Female Juvenile Offenders*. 14 Stan. L. & Pol'y Rev. 29, 2003.

⁴¹ Cathy Schoen et al., *The Commonwealth Fund Survey for the Health of Adolescent Girls*, November 1997.

⁴² *Investing in Girls: A 21st Century Strategy*, Juvenile Justice Journal Volume VI, no. 1, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 1999.

individuals.⁴³ These victims choose to act out rather than admit to experiencing abuse, which is especially common when the abuse is perpetrated by a family member.

Girls who experience such abuse often run away. Runaway girls are more likely than boys to resort to prostitution for either money or drugs in order to survive. It is estimated that 40 to 75 percent of adolescent girl prostitutes have been victims of prior physical or sexual abuse and have run away from home.⁴⁴ What began as just running away to escape the violence often turns into prostitution, drug abuse and other crimes that, ultimately, may lead to a prison sentence forever changing the victim's life, all because she wanted away from the violence.

The Cycle of Violence

Violence has a tendency to move from generation to generation. The only way to end domestic violence once and for all is to halt the progression of the second cycle to further generations. There is no one factor that causes someone to become an abuser. However, children who grow up in homes where domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking occur are more likely to become victims or perpetrators of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking themselves.⁴⁵ This factor can be eliminated all together by halting the cycle at its origin—the youth and young adults who witness or experience these types of violence. Men who as children were exposed to their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own wives as sons of nonviolent parents.⁴⁶ Is that the legacy we want to leave with our sons? Is the message we want to give to our children one of violence?

Youth won't learn about abuse, the cycle or healthy relationships, from each other, and they're not talking to us about it. According to one study of 13 to 18 year olds, only 33 percent of the nearly 700 respondents who had been in or knew about an abusive relationship said they had told

⁴³ Snyder, H.N. *Juvenile Arrests 2000*. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002.

⁴⁴ Sharp, Christy and Jessica Simon. *Girls in the Juvenile Justice System. The Need for More Gender-Responsive Services*. Child Welfare League of America, 2004.

⁴⁵ Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, APA, 1996.

⁴⁶ Strauss, Murray A., Gelles, Richard, and Smith, Christine. *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 1990.

someone about it.⁴⁷ Additionally, 73 percent said that if they were trapped in an abusive relationship, they would talk through the problem with their friends.⁴⁸ This is largely a case of the blind leading the blind. Youth must be taught at every opportunity that abusive relationships are unhealthy and that there are ways out so that they can teach each other when one is in need.

VAWA 2005: A Solution for Children and Youth

The previous Violence Against Women Acts may not have included children and youth specifically, but VAWA 2005 (S. 1197) does. Not only does VAWA 2005 reauthorize existing programs, but it is also amended to afford youth access to services and new programs which specifically target teens. Most notably, VAWA 2005 aims to provide for youth in Title III: Services, Protection and Justice for Young Victims of Violence. This title would create programs to educate people working with youth and young adults on how to recognize, respond to, and provide appropriate services to youth and young adult victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Rape Prevention and Education: Sec. 302

The Rape Prevention and Education program is to be reauthorized and amended in VAWA 2005. These essential grants allow rape prevention organizations to educate teens by staying in touch with the youth culture and responding with information in appropriate mediums whether through using music, magazines, “shout outs”, bilingual brochures, and interactive websites. These public awareness campaigns play a critical role in informing teens of their rights and responsibilities with respect to sexual abuse. Part of the funds will support the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, which is a comprehensive collection and distribution center for information and resources related to sexual violence.

Services to Advocate for and Respond to Teens (START): Sec. 303

The START program would provide grants to nonprofit, nongovernmental and community based organizations that provide services to teens and young adult victims of domestic violence, dating

⁴⁷ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

⁴⁸ Id.

violence, sexual assault and stalking. These grants would aid organizations is responding directly to the needs of abused teens. Without funding, many of these groups are unable to target teenagers. This funding will allow organizations to effectively reach youth and provide them with essential resources. The program focuses on early intervention. Teaching youth about healthy relationships and ending unhealthy relationships early on can help end domestic violence for our youth.

Teens aren't quite children or adults. As such, services targeted at ending dating violence must be geared specifically for their age group. Although violence is widespread in the teen population, and young people are often particularly at risk for abuse in dating relationships, there are limited services specifically intended for adolescents. The vast majority of resources are either child abuse services geared toward young children or domestic violence services focused on adult victims.

In addition to this lack of services, teens face other obstacles to seeking help. They often do not have access to shelter, money or transportation. They must overcome issues such as distrust of adults, lack of knowledge about available resources, or pressure from peers and parents. Confusion about the law adds another layer of difficulty for young people in need. Often teens will not reach out for help because they do not know their rights. They also have fears about lack of confidentiality, mandated child abuse reporting and parental consent laws. Jean, a college student, said she didn't want to get her boyfriend "in trouble" by reporting his violence to someone. The desire for confidentiality and confusion about the law are two of the most significant barriers to youth seeking help with domestic or dating violence.⁴⁹ The START program will allow service providers to reach these youth through programming targeted to their unique needs.

Access to Justice: Sec. 303

The Access to Justice program creates demonstration grants for courts, service providers, and law enforcement agencies to work together. Ending the cycle of violence will take the whole

⁴⁹ Veronique Autphenne, Amy Gluckim and Ellen Iverson, *Teen Relationship Abuse: Regional Needs Assessment*. Children's Hospital/Los Angeles, Division of Adolescent Medicine, funded by the California Department of Health Services, Maternal and Child Health Branch/Domestic Violence Section, 2000.

community, and this program has that goal in mind. Too often, youth perpetrators do not get in trouble for the abuse they commit. In many states, youth victims are not eligible for protection orders unless they have had a child with or live with the perpetrator. Very few states specifically allow minors to obtain protection orders. We must hold all abusers accountable for their actions and protect all victims regardless of age. This program aims at bringing systems together in a community to develop a comprehensive response to teen dating and sexual violence. One Break the Cycle client spoke of her frustration:

I talked to my mother about pursuing a restraining order, but she was against it. I got into many arguments with my parents because their idea of what was best for me didn't include legal protection. I felt trapped because I thought I could never get a restraining order unless my parents would agree to get one for me.

- Angela, age 17, San Francisco, CA

Youth do have some rights though and can learn to assert them, in situations like Angela's. The process should not be baffling, should not seem impossible to youth. Access to Justice aims at de-mystifying the legal system for youth, in such ways as creating multi-service facilities where youth can address all needs in one facility. Jennifer, one of our clients, describes her seeking help in this way:

I obtained a messy pile of restraining order forms at school, but the tedious instructions left me confused and discouraged.

- Jennifer, age 21, Los Angeles, CA

It is difficult enough for a teenager to try to get out of his or her violent relationship. Making the process confusing and discouraging is not the message we should be sending our youth. It's great that her school had the restraining order forms, but we hope that with this program, someone would help her make sense of them and walk through the process with her from filling the forms out to walking into court with her. Perhaps some day Santa Clara, California will not be the only county in the nation with a juvenile domestic violence court.⁵⁰ Until then, this bill will ensure confidentiality while continuing to improve responses through networks that include the courts and youth based community groups. Collaboration of such groups will help to

⁵⁰ I. Sagatun-Edwards, E. Hyman, et al. "The Santa Clara County Juvenile Domestic and Family Violence Court," *Journal of the Center for Families, Children and the Courts* (2003). This court was established in 1999.

improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the court in responding to youth cases involving domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking and serve as models for other communities.

Grants for Training and Collaboration on the Intersection between Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment: Sec. 303

Domestic violence often occurs in homes where child abuse and neglect occur, and, yet, separate entities deal with each area. These grants would enable the development of collaborative responses, services and cross-training so that when a situation arises in a home where both domestic violence and child maltreatment occur, the response is better for all of the victims. This allows for a better use of our limited resources as law enforcement, courts, child welfare agencies, domestic and sexual violence service providers and other community organizations could deal with both problems simultaneously. And, in fact, the two are inextricably linked. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country.⁵¹ With better training and collaboration, this program will prevent child abuse and neglect fatalities. The program will save children's lives.

Grants to Reduce Violence Against Women on Campus: Sec. 304

The grants to reduce violence on campuses have been very successful over the last few years. VAWA 2005 reauthorizes these grants providing more funding while directing more of the dollars to direct services. Jean's story shows one of the successes of this program:

The turning point for me came with a college advisor, who forced me to confront my situation, who pushed me to recognize that the abuse to my body and mind were not my fault. As more and more time passes, I am learning again to trust myself, to trust others, and to take care of myself. The ability to trust is one that is explicitly human, and one that I lacked for many years after experiencing dating violence. In essence, girls need to be taught to trust, to be able to confront their abuse, to be able to learn to live without it.

—Jean, age 20, New York, NY

⁵¹ U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States: Fifth Report, 1995.

These grants will help campuses across the nation teach victims lessons far more important than anything they'll learn in earning their degrees. They'll learn that they do not deserve the abuse. Early intervention is essential in preventing these victims from accepting such behavior in future relationships. With these programs, the cycle of violence can be ended before it has time to fester and grow. These grants will also help train campus law enforcement and campus judicial boards to hold young abusers liable for their crimes, to send a message that violence is not acceptable on our campuses.

Juvenile Justice: Sec. 305

With the increase in the number of females entering the juvenile system, gender specific programming is essential. So many are victims of abuse prior to entering the system, and, in fact, their abuse may be a critical factor in their entry into the system. With the rampant rates of abuse, the unique needs of girls must be addressed. Girls need to have experts to provide care management that deals with very specific mental and emotional issues arising from the trauma they have experienced.

This part of S. 1197 would amend the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and would direct states to include such gender-specific programs as part of their juvenile justice state plans. These provisions will combat the problem by requiring states to provide services that are tailored to the unique needs of girls focusing on their experiences with abuse. It will also help the numerous pregnant girls who enter the system after being abused and provide girls with knowledge to enter healthy relationships after their release. With so many of the girls being abused before entering, we must have an effective means to teach them how not to resort to crime again and how to appropriately deal with the abuse they've experienced.

Safe Havens: Sec. 306

According to one study, 5 percent of abusive fathers threaten during visitation to kill the mother, 34 percent of fathers threaten to kidnap their children, and 25 percent threaten to hurt their

children.⁵² The breaking up of a family with separation and divorce is difficult enough on children without the addition of domestic violence, sexual violence, or child abuse. The Safe Haven provision of this bill aims to reduce domestic violence and child abuse during parental visitation and transfer of children for visitation by expanding the availability of supervised visitation centers. This way, children are not alone with an abusive parent, but still are able to visit with their parent. Moreover, adult victims can be kept safe during visitation exchange. This program has a special focus on keeping children and parents who have been abused safe.

Supporting Teens through Education and Protection Act (STEP)

The proposed STEP Act will work to create better responses to middle and high school students who are victims of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. These grants would help schools develop effective school policies to deal with students experiencing dating and sexual violence. Schools will train teachers, coaches, and administrators to recognize and address issues related to dating violence and sexual assault.

These grants will aid middle and high schools in developing safe, reliable, confidential policies, procedures and response systems. Youth spend at least seven hours a day, 35 hours a week in our nation's schools. For teens in domestic violence homes or relationships, schools can be a safe place and provide a wealth of resources. And yet, right now they are not. S. 1197 does not include the STEP program. The House bill (H.R. 2876), introduced by Mark Green (R-WI) and John Conyers (D-MI) and supported by close to 70 cosponsors, includes this critical program to support our nation's schools and the students who attend them. We strongly encourage the Senate to adopt this essential provision as part of S. 1197 in order to help our schools to protect our youth.

⁵² Joan Zora, *Protecting the Children in Custody Disputes When One Parent Abuses the Other*, 29 Clearinghouse Rev. 1113, 119 (1996).

Other Provisions of VAWA 2005 to Aid Youth

Minors, under the age of 18, account for 67 percent of all sexual assault victimizations.⁵³

Therefore, the proposed Sexual Assault Services Act (SASA) in Sec. 202 will provide enormous aid to our abused youth. Over the past few years, rape crisis centers have made significant progress in helping victims receive the services they need. But, rape crisis centers are plagued by a lack of resources which has been heightened by the short fall in state budgets recently. SASA creates a federal funding stream dedicated entirely to the provision of direct services for victims of sexual violence. Additionally, resources would be granted to state sexual assault coalitions whose technical assistance is invaluable to service providers nationwide. The focus on emergency and 24 hour services for victims will strengthen the 1,300 rape crisis centers across the nation.

Prevention is key to ending the cycle of violence. Title IV of the proposed law concentrates on prevention strategies in order to strengthen America's families. It would provide services to children growing up in violent homes (Sec. 401). New programs would educate service providers in home visitation programs to enable early intervention (Sec. 401) and would engage men and boys as allies in efforts to end domestic and sexual violence (Sec. 402). Education is critical to halting the cycle of violence and, in fact, 63% of teens said it would be helpful for learn about issues such as abusive relationships in school⁵⁴. With VAWA 2005, educating our youth is possible.

In 1994, it became a federal crime to cross state lines to commit domestic violence.⁵⁵ VAWA 2005 takes this a step further by making it a federal crime to cross state lines to commit dating violence (Sec. 115). Dating violence perpetrators can now be prosecuted for entering another state to abuse a victim.

⁵³ Finkelhor, David and Ormrod, Richard, "Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles," *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Dept. of Justice, June 2000.

⁵⁴ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. Feb 2005.

⁵⁵ 18 U.S.C. § 2261 (2005)

Support VAWA 2005 for our Children

Dating violence and sexual assault threaten the youth of our nation from coast to coast in astounding numbers. Youth respond to such violence in many ways including silence, telling their friends, running away, and becoming violent. Adults witness the side effects of the violence, but are often unaware of the underlying problem. We as a nation have a duty to support our youth as they transition to adulthood. We have a duty to teach them how to live healthy lives, lives without dating and sexual violence. We see the problem, now it's time to implement a solution.

The Violence against Women Act has proved a successful strategy for combating violence. Millions of women and men have been helped at a substantial financial savings to the nation. But, our children, our successors have been forgotten. VAWA 2005 will bring critical programs and services to our youth specifically targeted at their unique needs. VAWA 2005 strives to end dating and sexual violence before another generation experiences the pain and consequences of such violence. Prevention and early intervention programs promise to reach out to our youth, to provide them with knowledge about healthy relationship, and offer resources to escape abusive relationships. It is time to send a message to our youth that we will help them, that we see them being hurt and it's not tolerable. It is time to address our youth's needs because they are our future. We must immediately pass the Violence Against Women Act of 2005.