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Domestic Victimization

Editorial

According to Christopher Lasch the family could (or should) be seen as 'a haven in a heartless world'. In the seventies, he restored the family as the cornerstone of culture. Raising children in a stable and safe environment seems to be the best way to build a socially cohesive culture, according to Lasch. Caring families lead to a caring society. However, the family does not always seem to be a peaceful place. The intimacy of the family also gives the opportunity for cruelty, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. The family could also be seen as 'a puddle in a heartless world'. It is at least true to say that the family is one of the most complicated human systems. Love and hate, tenderness and aggression, humiliation and admiration seem to go in tandem in this system of intimacy.

In this issue of the European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research the family and its direct relations is the subject under scrutiny; victimization among kith and kin is the main focus. The issue is opened with a report by Ton van Dijk et al. of a recent nation-wide study on domestic violence in the Netherlands. The results are quite amazing: 45% of the respondents had at one time been a victim of some form of non-incidental domestic violence. The survey carried out among 1,000 Dutch citizens also found that both men and women become victims of domestic violence, and the high percentage of victims who suffered abuse during childhood years is particularly striking. Furthermore, it turned out that domestic violence often involves a combination of physical, mental and sexual forms of violence. The second article of Edna Erez and Joanne Belknap addresses the issue of the responses of the criminal justice system towards battered women. More specifically the co-operation of these women as victims and witnesses is analyzed by examining experiences, opinions and perceptions of experts who deal most closely with battered women. Although the study was done in the United States it may be of importance for some European countries too. These experts can fill a gap in our knowledge regarding factors that enhance or inhibit battered women's co-operation. Their behaviour as victims and witnesses may vary depending on the stage of the criminal justice process. The article concludes with an assessment of the practical relevance of the findings.

Women are mostly seen as victims of domestic and sexual violence. Susan Robinson gives another picture. In the area of child sexual abuse, women have had virtually no official recognition as offenders. It is difficult for many people to accept that women do sexually abuse children and this can result in accusations being discounted by personnel in child protection services and the police. Unintentional non-enforcement of social sanctions on criminal conduct can occur when agencies fail to process female abusers of children. This can also result in victims having great difficulty in reporting female sexual abuse and they run the risk that they will not be believed when they do. Women can and do sexually abuse children; the author gives estimates that there are 3.1 million female abusers. This article discusses female abusers of children and the way in which such cases are processed by the criminal justice system.

Simha F. Landau and Susan Hattis Rolef investigated all 76 cases of intimate femicide (the killing of women by their intimate male partners) in Israel during the years 1990-1995. The findings show a relationship between the incidence of intimate femicide and a number of major events/developments experienced by Israeli society during the period investigated. During the Persian Gulf War (in 1991), for example, when families were enclosed for lengthy periods in sealed rooms, there was a sharp increase in intimate femicide. New immigrants are over-represented among intimate femicide offenders. In most cases, more than one motive is given for the intimate femicide. The findings are discussed within a theoretical framework which postulates that violence in society will be positively related to stress factors and negatively related to support systems.

Andromache Tseloni and Ken Pease discuss a completely different kind of victimization of women: obscene or nuisance phone calls. Employing data from two sweeps of the British Crime Survey a decade apart (BCS 1982 and BCS 1992), the article describes the effects of individual socio-economic characteristics and the victimization history of women in England and Wales on the likelihood of them receiving at least one nuisance call. Some preliminary analyses show that fear of crime and worries about experiencing specific types of crime are closely related to receiving nuisance phone calls. The groups of women most victimized by such calls are the young, single or divorced, with children, living

on their own, in inner cities and with other victimization experiences in the past. It would appear that the caller knows the victim but the opposite is not always true. Risks of nuisance calls are calculated from models for five hypothetical women: single mother, professional, student, housewife and pensioner.

In the section Current issues two important subjects are discussed. Uberto Gatti comments on the idea that early intervention can prevent crime - the topic of this journal last year (vol. 5, no. 2). In recent years, programmes for the early prevention of anti-social behaviour have been refined on the basis of ample longitudinal studies, which have provided a more solid basis for their elaboration. Now that the question of inefficacy has been overcome (at least in theory, since the experimental programmes so far carried out have to be repeated and verified on a large scale), there remains the problem of the acceptability of these programmes from an ethical point of view. Indeed, any attempt to modify human behaviour and any intrusion into a person's private life must be carefully scrutinized in that they pose potential threats to the rights of the individual.

The other current issue is stalking, discussed by Sarah Gibbons. New legislation to tackle the growing problem of stalking has recently been introduced in the UK after a campaign by police, victims and Members of Parliament, angry that it was not recognized as a specific crime. Research to find an effective and workable solution led to studies of the systems in place in America, Australia and Canada. The new Protection from Harassment Act, implemented in June 1997, provides two new criminal offences and a civil tort, breach of which is also a crime. This report examines the new legislation and its implications in closer detail and looks at how some other European countries tackle the problem.

The crime institute profile is about the Cambridge Institute of Criminology and was written by Anthony Bottoms.