



NJCBW UPDATE

May 2009

**New Jersey Association of Domestic
Violence Professionals
7th Annual Conference
Enhancing our Response to Victims of
Domestic Violence
Rutgers University
Busch Campus
Piscataway, New Jersey
Wednesday, June 10, 2009**

For brochure, registration and directions to Busch
Campus go to www.njcbw.org

AN EMERGING ISSUE

In Vermont and Nebraska, lawmakers are considering measures that would disallow felony prosecutions. In Pennsylvania, a federal judge issued a restraining order to stop a zealous prosecutor from filing criminal charges. But in jurisdictions around the country, teens are being prosecuted for child pornography.

It's all because of sexting – a relatively new phenomenon made possible by ubiquitous new technologies that allow teenagers to send nude or semi-nude photos, usually of themselves, to someone else's cell phone.

Most often, a teenage girl sends these photos to a boyfriend, intended only for him. But what happens if her boyfriend forwards it widely – right away, or perhaps later after an ugly break-up? And what if the photo was coerced, or taken by a third party of a teen who was incapacitated by alcohol or drugs? Then what is the appropriate response from the criminal justice system, lawmakers, educators, parents and communities?

Many are struggling to figure that out, and to create laws, rules and guidelines that will protect victims and punish offenders without creating criminal records for teenagers who make mistakes but don't intend to cause serious harm.

Sexting is a highly emotional issue. Few want young people who make mistakes to be labeled child pornographers or sex offenders for life. But many prosecutors are determined to take a strong stand in

order to stop this practice, even if it means prosecuting a teenage girl who sends a semi-nude picture to her boyfriend, or the boyfriend who forwards it to one friend. It's easy to understand why; at least one mother attributes her daughter's suicide to the trauma caused by her former boyfriend forwarding a photo she intended only for him (*to read more about that case, please visit www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29546030/*).

Domestic and sexual violence experts are being asked about sexting more and more. What is the appropriate response? What kinds of prevention can prevent this practice? What kinds of policies should schools and school systems adopt? What should parents be telling teens?

The Facts

A recent survey from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com found that one in five teen girls – and one in ten younger teen girls (age 13 to 16) – say they have electronically sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves.

Even more teen girls, 37 percent, say they have sent or posted sexually suggestive texts, emails or Instant Messages.

That same survey found that more than half of teen girls (51 percent) say pressure from a guy is a reason girls send sexy messages or images, while only 18 percent of teen boys say pressure from a girl is a reason. Twelve percent of teen girls who have sent sexually suggestive messages or images say they felt "pressured" to do so.

The Response Today

Many experts are concluding that existing laws are inadequate, and damaging over-reactions are occurring. The result, right now, is a confusing mix of threats, prosecutions, rules, and guidelines that may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and even case to case.

Appropriate Response

"We advocate a common sense approach to sexting that recognizes that teenagers don't always exercise the best judgment – but that also makes a distinction between mischief and poor judgment, on the one hand, and malice that causes real harm on the other," said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta

Soler. “Laws need to recognize the difference between a girl sending a private photo to her boyfriend or a boyfriend receiving that photo, and a boy taking and distributing a picture of a girl who’s been compromised by a date rape drug at a party. And police and prosecutors need to exercise sound judgment when enforcing those laws.”

Soler notes that the domestic violence field has seen cases of well-intentioned laws and over-zealous prosecution that caused more harm than good. Disastrous laws designed to protect children who witness domestic violence ended up ripping them away from their nonviolent mothers. Laws designed to protect battered women by requiring doctors to tell police if they suspected domestic violence ended up preventing women from getting medical care for serious injuries. And laws designed to cause more batterers to be arrested ended up causing more victims to be arrested.

“Above all, we should remember that the vast majority of prosecutions represent a failure to prevent,” Soler continued. “That’s why our primary focus is on helping teenagers connect the dots so they will recognize what is and isn’t okay. Teenagers are, by definition, still developing, still testing boundaries, still figuring out their lives. If we rely too heavily on the kinds of black/white solutions the criminal justice system offers, we will sacrifice too many of them to their mistakes rather than protecting them from their mistakes.”

The Family Violence Prevention Fund’s That’s Not Cool campaign, created in partnership with the Advertising Council and the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, is designed to start a conversation among teens about how controlling behavior and harassment from a boyfriend or girlfriend, online or via cell phone, can turn into abuse. Learn more at www.thatsnotcool.com.

From Speaking UP: May 8, Vol.15, Issue 6

PREVENTING VIOLENCE CAN REDUCE HEALTH CARE COSTS

The American Medical Association’s (AMA’s) National Advisory Council on Violence and Abuse convened violence prevention and health experts on April 16 to brief congressional staff about how victims exposed to violence and abuse access health care more frequently and at a greater cost than those without that history. Experts said that physical, sexual and psychological violence can have a significant impact on victims’ long-term health, and that effective intervention and prevention strategies can decrease the health care costs associated with the short- and long-term consequences of abuse paid by private and public insurers.

Studies show that women who have experienced domestic violence are 80 percent more likely to have a stroke, 70 percent more likely to have heart disease, 60 percent more likely to have asthma and 70 percent more likely to drink heavily than women who have not

experienced intimate partner violence. Children who experience childhood trauma, including witnessing incidents of domestic violence, are at a greater risk of having serious adult health problems including tobacco use, substance abuse, obesity, cancer, heart disease, depression and a higher risk for unintended pregnancy.

The Academy on Violence and Abuse recently released a white paper, *Hidden Costs in Health Care, The Economic Impact of Violence and Abuse*, which was available at the briefing. It provides an overview of the research in this area and finds that expenses related to violence and abuse may cost the health care system hundreds of billions of dollars each year. The full white paper is available at <http://avahealth.org>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports 1,200 deaths and two million injuries to women from intimate partner violence each year. On average, three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends each day in this country. 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year, and seven million children live in families in which severe partner violence occurred.

“As health care reform advances, violence prevention needs to be an integral part of the discussion,” Stewart added. “As we heard here today, violence prevention can play a key role in reducing health care costs. In the current economic climate, saving valuable health care dollars is essential.”
From Speaking UP: May 8, Vol.15, Issue 6

NEW RESOURCE

The Family Violence Prevention Fund, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Greater Hartford Legal Aid have just released a new guide to improve outreach and responses to domestic violence victims who are in contact with their partners or children’s fathers. This new resource addresses how to identify safety strategies, find resources and to know what to say when a victim’s focus and goals are to remain in contact, remain in the relationship or to improve their children’s relationship with their father. It also recommends what kinds of new partnerships need to be developed to benefit these women and children, how to talk to women and children about what helps men change, and organizational opportunities and challenges to become more relevant in communities. To download the new guide, visit [http://endabuse.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/Advocates%20Guide\(1\).pdf](http://endabuse.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/Advocates%20Guide(1).pdf).

NNEDV: CLOSE GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE

On April 21, NNEDV joined Sens. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and Jack Reed (D-RI) in urging lawmakers to close the legal loophole that allows domestic abusers and other violent

offenders to purchase firearms at gun shows. This loophole allows people to purchase guns from unlicensed gun show dealers without going through any background check. A gun is the most common weapon used in domestic violence cases, and passing common-sense legislation would help save thousands of lives.

"Domestic abusers should not have access to guns," said Sue Else, NNEDV president. "Many batterers exploit the gun show loophole, and the consequences are life-threatening and fatal. Arming people who brutally beat their spouses or partners is a recipe for disaster."

According to a 2003 study, access to firearms increases the risk of intimate partner homicide by more than five times. A 2004 study found that more than three times as many women are murdered by guns used by their husbands or intimate partners than are murdered by strangers' guns, knives, or other weapons combined.

One of NNEDV's six federal legislative priorities is to push for the extension of criminal background checks to gun shows, thereby closing the loophole and reducing gun violence.

"Senator Lautenberg's legislation makes sense," Else said. "The bill would save lives and increase safety for domestic violence victims and their children."

From National Network To End Domestic Violence COALITION UPDATE, May 2009

UPCOMING TRAINING

All training classes for June are full. Watch the Coalition web site www.njcbw.org for information about training for July to December 2009.

JUNE 2009 MEETING SCHEDULE

Women of Diversity Task Force Meeting

Friday, June 6, 2009 10:00am-1:00pm

NJAVDP Annual Conference

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

**Rutgers University – Busch Campus
Piscataway, New Jersey**

Community/Professional Educator Network (CPEN)

Friday, June 12, 2009 10:30am-1:00pm

Legal Advocates Meeting

Friday, June 19, 2009 10:30am-3:00pm

Battered Lesbian Task Force

Thursday, June 26, 2009 10:30am (Rutgers)

JULY 2009 MEETING SCHEDULE

Coalition Membership Meeting

Thursday, July 9, 2009 10:00am-1:00pm

Coalition Board of Trustees Meeting

Thursday, July 9, 2009 1:00pm-3:00pm

NJ Child Advocate Network (CAN)

Friday, July 10, 2009 10:30am-3:30pm

Legal Advocates Meeting

Friday, July 17, 2009 10:30am-3:00pm

Battered Lesbian Task Force

Thursday, July 23, 2009 10:30am (Rutgers)

DVRT (Domestic Violence Response Team) Meeting

Tuesday, July 28, 10:00am – 3:00pm

Call the Meeting Cancellation Line to check for training and meeting cancellations 609-584-8107, ext. 23

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

November 6-7, 2009, Collegeville, MN

First National Conference for Campus-Based Men's Gender Equality & Anti-Violence Groups

This conference will be the first chance for male students from across the country to explore how to find positive ways to reach campus men with messages against dating and other forms of men's violence, and for gender equality. It will provide opportunities to discuss how to deal with backlash and hostility, and how to work in partnership with women's groups. St. John's University will host the conference. *For more details, email gkellom@csbsju.edu.*