The Effect of Media Attention on Domestic Violence Organizations

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Domestic Violence Defined:

- Sexual assault, sexual battery, or any criminal act that results in physical injury or death to a family member or members would constitute domestic violence in a legal sense. (McKenzie, 1995)

- 3 Types:
  - Spouse Abuse (Main focus of this study)
  - Child Abuse
  - Elder Abuse
History of Domestic Violence

Early History (taken from Cherlin, 2002)

- Puritans believed that government should enforce moral behavior
  - Moral behavior excluded wife beating or other violent acts by husbands
- First law against wife beating enacted in 1641 in Massachusetts

The Twentieth Century

- No attention to wife beating until mid 1970s
- By end of 1970s almost every state had enacted laws to protect women from violence
- In 1980, Congress proposed legislation to provide support for victims of domestic violence
Research Question

- What causes domestic violence organizations to form?
This research hypothesizes that media attention influences organizational founding. Since the media glamorizes issues and makes them appear more prevalent than they truly are, individuals will feel the need to form an organization to combat the issue.
Data and Methods

- Government Attention
  - Congressional Hearings
    - Policy Agendas Project
- Media Attention
  - New York Times Articles
    - New York Times Historical Index (1851-2001)
- Key Domestic Violence Events/ Women’s Rights Events
- Domestic Violence Rate
  - Intimate Partner Homicide
    - Rennison, 2000
- Women’s Rights Organizations
  - “Women’s Rights” Keyword
    - Associations Unlimited
Keywords

Focal
- “Family Violence”
- “Domestic Violence”
- “Battered Women”

Relevant
- “Dating Violence”
- “In-home Abuse”
- “Intimate Abuse”
- “Intimate Violence”
- “Spouse Abuse”
- “Relationship Violence”
- “Battered Wife”
Organizational Foundings

- Boomed in the late 1970s

Source: Associations Unlimited
Key Women’s Rights Events

- 1848- 1st Women’s Rights Convention
- 1920- 19th amendment
- 1971- First “speak-out” on rape
  Shelter movement started in England
- 1973- 1st shelter for abused women in Phoenix, AZ
- 1976- NOW Task Force founded
  Bruno v. McGuire
- 1978- NCADV was founded
- 1979- NYC family law
- 1984- Family Violence Prevention and Services Act
- 1994- OJ Simpson Trial
Both became prominent in the 1970s.
Domestic Violence Rate

- Positive relationship \((r = 0.316)\)

Source: Rennison and Associations Unlimited
Domestic Violence Rate

- According to Pleck (1987), periods of attention to domestic violence have less to do with the prevalence of violence than with the power of various political and social groups.
- The previous graph reaffirms this observation.
Media Attention

- Boomed in the early 1990s

![Graph showing the number of NYT articles over time. The graph highlights a significant increase in the early 1990s. The y-axis represents the number of NYT articles, and the x-axis represents the year from 1852 to 1996. The graph includes lines for search terms such as "domestic" and "violence," "battered" and "women," "family" and "violence," and "battered wife." The source is NYT Historical.]
Media Attention

- Shows that organizational foundings precede media attention

Source: NYT Historical and Associations Unlimited
Congressional Hearings

- Organizational foundings peaked before congressional hearings

Source: Policy Agendas Project and Associations Unlimited
Women’s Rights Organizations

- Domestic violence organizational foundings follow women’s rights organizational foundings

Source: Associations Unlimited
Conclusions

- The hypothesis of this study was not proven

- Women’s rights organizations precede domestic violence organizations
Limitations

- Domestic violence rate measure (intimate partner homicide)
  - Not the most precise measure of domestic violence
  - Homicide can be recorded

- Government attention measure (congressional hearings)
  - Domestic violence laws are mostly at the state level
Bibliography