

Ending Violence

By Lynn Rosenthal, White House adviser on violence against women

Women today are moving in ever expanding circles. We can't look at a day's headlines without reading about incredible women breaking new glass ceilings in sports, politics, science, and the corporate world. Yet as a long-time advocate for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, I have met far too many women whose potential to achieve their own dreams was radically changed when they became victims of violence. Our nation has suffered from this lost potential.

I was the director of a battered women's shelter when I read the 1991 report by then Senator Joseph Biden called "A Week in the Life of American Women." Describing incidents of rape and battering that women were experiencing around the country, this report provided the momentum needed to pass the Violence Against Women Act in 1994. Since then we have made great strides. There is no doubt that domestic violence and sexual assault are no longer the hidden crimes they once were, and that victims now have a place to turn rather than suffer in isolation. Still, violence today is all too common and takes a tremendous toll on women and their families.

Domestic violence and sexual assault affect victims physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. For victims of domestic violence, every day is a struggle to keep themselves and their children safe. It is an exhausting world of trying to work while someone is sabotaging you, trying to care for your children while someone is threatening them, trying to live while someone may be trying to kill you. Sexual violence also takes its toll on women and

girls. While we imagine the stranger in a dark alley, most women who are sexually assaulted are attacked when they least expect it, usually by someone they know and often by someone they trust. Young women are at the greatest risk of such violence, and the aftermath can be devastating.

Despite the challenges we face, I am more optimistic than ever about our future. Earlier this summer, I was named White House adviser on Violence Against Women, a newly created position, dedicated specifically to advising the president and vice president on domestic violence and sexual assault. I believe that we now have a rare opportunity to change the future. We have an opportunity to make sure that all girls grow up without the scars of violence and abuse, and that all women are free to reach their true potential. When we accomplish this, we will truly have a woman's nation.

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