

# JWI'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A PORTRAIT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE  
IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE  
NATIONAL & CHICAGOLAND  
NEEDS ASSESSMENTS



## **DEDICATION**

This report is dedicated to the many survivors of abuse who so graciously gave of their time during the course of the studies of this report. Only through their honesty, sensitivity and willingness to share their personal experiences can we fully understand the impact domestic abuse has on Jewish homes and families.

**A Portrait of Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community:  
Key Findings of the National and Chicagoland Needs Assessments  
Jewish Women International  
May 2004**

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## FOREWORD

Jewish Women International is proud to issue this important resource, which supports the under-recognized assertion that domestic abuse has a significant impact on Jewish homes and families. What follows is a summary of the key findings and priorities for action from two independent studies conducted by JWI in 2003.

Over an 18-month period, JWI designed, developed and directed the National Needs Assessment and the Chicagoland Needs Assessment. Through these studies, we hoped to further our organizational understanding about the issue of domestic abuse in the Jewish community and to contribute to the library of resources currently available. While the studies were not designed to provide statistically significant data, the individual surveys, focus groups and interviews provide important supporting information on both the overt and subtle elements of abuse, highlights their debilitating impact, and looks at concrete ways the community can better serve abused Jewish women and their families.

Domestic abuse is a complex issue. If we are serious about better serving families who are trapped in the cycle of abuse, primarily the women and children of those families, then we must be committed to providing better support services, increased funding for programs and services, appropriate training for practitioners, service providers, and rabbis, and greater awareness in our homes, in our families and in our synagogues. However, if we are serious about ending abuse and creating a model of how a faith community responds, we must be committed to giving the issue greater visibility, accepting that abuse is present in Jewish homes, fully funding the programs that serve abused women and their children, educating the entire Jewish community, and serving our youth and young adults with programs that teach them at the front end of their adult lives about healthy relationships.

It is our hope that this report will be used by individuals, organizations, agencies and programs to strengthen their work. Further, we hope that it will be a catalyst to drive much needed resources to communities and to create an atmosphere of compassion and understanding throughout Jewish institutions, thus enabling improved institutional responses. And, finally, it is our sincerest hope that millions of individuals around the world will join us in a global Jewish community **Call to Action** to end domestic abuse as described immediately following this report's Conclusion.

JWI and our more than 75,000 volunteers, members, donors, partners and supporters remain committed to ensuring that over time, we will end the cycle of abuse. We believe that women and children have the right to grow up in homes free of violence, coercion, and emotional degradation. With our goal firmly in hand, we will continue our work to educate the public about domestic abuse, to seek out solutions that increase services to victims and survivors, and to lead a worldwide, collaborative **Call to Action** to end domestic abuse.

Millie Sernovitz  
International President

Loribeth Weinstein  
Executive Director

## INTRODUCTION

*Domestic abuse is a significant issue adversely impacting Jewish homes and families.*

For more than one hundred years, Jewish Women International (JWI) (formerly B'nai B'rith Women) has worked to strengthen the lives of women, children and families through education, action and advocacy. In 1988 JWI narrowed its focus on domestic abuse after a JWI member was murdered by her husband. Although not primarily involved in domestic abuse prior to that time, JWI felt the urgency and the responsibility to respond. At a time when the Jewish community had long been silent about domestic abuse, JWI pushed the discussion into the public arena. Now, nearly two decades later, JWI has set in motion a long-term campaign – **The Call to Action** – dedicated to developing a comprehensive, global, collaborative strategy to end violence in the Jewish community.

In the fall of 2002, as part of this long-term campaign, JWI began work on the design of a two-part needs assessment study - a national study that would serve as a baseline tool and a community-based study that could be replicated by other communities. Over the next twelve months, with support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, two independent, but complementary studies were developed and conducted. Independently, the National Needs Assessment and the Chicagoland Needs Assessment have important value in their own right. Together they echo each other's findings that domestic abuse is a significant issue adversely impacting Jewish homes and families and far too often the needs of all those affected by the abuse, primarily women and children, are unmet.

Domestic abuse has no boundaries; it affects all types of relationships and cuts across all racial, ethnic and socio-economic lines. The range of abusive behavior includes sexual, psychological, verbal, physical and financial abuse. Domestic abuse prevalence estimates vary widely and depend on the definition of abuse and methodology used; however, population studies of the lifetime prevalence of physical or sexual assault of women by an intimate partner in the United States generally fall in the range of twenty-five to thirty-five percent.<sup>1</sup> While there are no reliable estimates of the incidence or prevalence of domestic abuse in the Jewish community, clinical and other data support the assertion that domestic abuse is a significant and under-recognized issue that impacts Jewish homes and families. The National Needs Assessment and the Chicagoland Needs Assessment only serve to support that assertion.

The myth that Jewish families are immune from abuse enables a system of missed cues, thereby preventing appropriate intervention. Jewish women themselves often delay seeking help or more often never seek help at all. The shame (*shonda*) associated with abuse, the fear of losing their children in custody battles, and the lack of access to financial resources for legal fees, housing and other transitional needs represent significant barriers for many women.

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<sup>1</sup> Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. National Institute of Justice & the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/181867.pdf>. Plichta, S.B. & Falik, M. (2001). Prevalence of Violence and Its Implications for Women's Health. *Women's Health Issues*, 11, 244-258.

Often, a woman decides to leave an abusive relationship only to find many of her needs unmet. Since Jewish women do not usually seek emergency shelter, they are often left alone to negotiate a system of independent and disconnected programs and services. As well, extended support systems for Jewish women are often non-existent. Victims and survivors are more likely to seek help from friends, family or private psychotherapists than from any other source.

While the insights from rabbis in the studies were encouraging and indicate progress is being made around how rabbis address and confront domestic abuse issues that come to their attention, continued support and education for rabbis is still needed. As important leaders in the Jewish community, rabbis are vital in the fight to end domestic abuse and can serve as supporters and counselors not only for the victims and survivors of abuse but also for the abuser and other family members. Victims and survivors are far more likely to seek help from their rabbi if he/she has previously spoken out about domestic abuse. Rabbis can also play a pivotal role in early intervention.

It is estimated that more than seventy-five percent of the seventy-plus programs nationwide serving Jewish women and their children are less than ten years old. This alone supports the fact that awareness and acknowledgment are growing, that more and more women are speaking out about the abuse, and consequently more and more services are required to meet this growing need for support. As we acknowledge the progress that has been made, we must also acknowledge that much remains to be done.

Domestic abuse in the Jewish community must be addressed without reservation - in our homes, in our families, and in our synagogues. We must commit to creating a coordinated community response that provides a network of collaborative support and services among hotlines, mental health professionals (both Jewish and secular), rabbis, lawyers, law enforcement, health care workers, and other support services in lieu of the support that otherwise is provided by a shelter. A comprehensive public awareness campaign about domestic abuse in the Jewish community must be developed while additional research is required to grasp the full understanding of the prevalence, nature and scope of domestic abuse in the Jewish community. Increased funding from both the Jewish and secular communities is imperative and must be secured for programs and agencies providing services to victims and their families. New efforts and new resources must be identified for prevention programs, especially for youth, teens and young women. Training for medical professionals and law enforcement personnel must be offered so that cultural and religious factors do not impede early intervention and assistance. Graduate level curricula should include domestic abuse and training must be made available for therapists and other mental health professionals as well as Jewish educational professionals.

Funds and options must be identified to support the longer-term transitional needs of abused women and their children including housing, employment assistance and financial support. Rabbis must be encouraged to speak out about domestic abuse and supported through educational training opportunities so they can effectively face the challenges of dealing with domestic abuse issues in their congregations.

Through the honesty and sensitivities of the participants in both the National Needs Assessment and the Chicagoland Needs Assessment the information provided in this report supports many of the assertions already known about domestic abuse in the Jewish community, provides some new insights and understandings, and outlines several key priorities for action.

Domestic abuse is not a women's issue. It is an issue for the entire Jewish community and the role men can play in ending domestic abuse cannot be overstated. By serving as vocal advocates on the issues of domestic abuse as well as role models within their homes, their places of work and their communities, men can become a critical factor in the fight to end domestic abuse.

As a community, we cannot afford to continue the stereotypical view that domestic abuse is not a significant issue in Jewish homes. We must quash that myth and boldly chart a course to end the cycle of domestic abuse for all women and children. The Jewish community must mobilize so that together with compassion and resolve, dignity, safety and security are found in all Jewish homes.

## A PORTRAIT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

### Key Findings from the National and Chicagoland Needs Assessments Conducted by Jewish Women International

In early 2001, Jewish Women International (JWI) introduced a long-term global strategy to end domestic abuse in the Jewish community. In recognition of this promising work, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded JWI a three-year grant to help support three strategic efforts: education and training, an International Conference on Domestic Abuse, and a National Needs Assessment, which, along with its companion study the Chicagoland Needs Assessment, are the focus of this report.

Developed under the guidance of a National Needs Assessment Advisory Committee, the goal of the National Needs Assessment was to create a credible resource that could serve as a catalyst for furthering discussion, a resource for future programming, and an advocate for driving critical new thinking and increased funding to the issue of domestic abuse in the Jewish community.

Simultaneously, with financial support from the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago and with input and guidance from the Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Chicago Jewish Community, the Chicagoland Needs Assessment was designed to provide community-relevant insights and thus expand, support and strengthen the findings and recommendations of the National Needs Assessment.

Study data were collected from individual surveys, focus groups and informational interviews. Participants in the National Needs Assessment attended the First International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, "Pursuing Truth, Justice, and Righteousness", convened by JWI in July 2003. Conference participants were targeted because they represented a broad cross-section of domestic abuse practitioners, service providers, survivors, rabbis and others working in or interested in domestic abuse in the Jewish community. Participants in the Chicagoland Needs Assessment represented rabbis, community members, leaders and professionals in the Chicagoland community.

The **Key Findings** from both studies provide a greater awareness of domestic abuse in the Jewish community and its impact on families. The studies' combined **Priorities for Action** provide guidelines for future programming and funding while serving as an encouragement to victims and survivors that concrete strategies are identifiable and can be implemented with adequate funding for services and programs, greater awareness and continued commitment from rabbis, therapists, medical and law enforcement personnel and other Jewish and secular professionals and organizations, and an understanding from the entire Jewish community that domestic abuse exists and must be addressed.

## **Key Finding 1:**

*Domestic abuse in the Jewish community has no boundaries; it affects all types of relationships, all socio-economic classes, all ages and all spectrums of religious and cultural life. The range of identified behaviors of abuse is broad and includes sexual, verbal, psychological, physical, and financial abuse.*

Through the participation of survivors in the studies who had been abused as children, teens or adults and through the insights of professionals, the studies revealed a broad range of abuses including child abuse, child sexual assault, teens in dating relationships, elder abuse, and both heterosexual and gay/lesbian intimate partners. While there is no population-based research on the prevalence of abuse in Jewish homes, study respondents believe that domestic abuse is at least as common among Jews as it is in the general population.

For the most part, general population research on domestic violence reports only physical and sexual abuse. However, participants in the studies voiced highly inclusive definitions of domestic abuse and both professionals and survivors cited not only physical abuse, but also incidences of sexual, psychological, verbal, financial, and religious abuse. The behaviors identified as abusive by the studies' participants ranged from clear-cut physical violence such as hitting, kicking, slapping, and pushing to the psychological and more subtle forms of abusive behavior such as controlling all family finances to dictating religious observance. Of particular significance was the finding that nearly all of the women in the studies considered "threatening to take the children away" abusive. While difficult to assess without comparison data, this high percentage suggests that controlling and threatening behavior regarding children may be especially relevant in the Jewish community.

### **Priorities for Action:**

An expanded public awareness campaign about domestic abuse in the Jewish community must be implemented globally. Only by quashing the myth that domestic abuse does not impact Jewish families, and by furthering a greater understanding of the complexity of these issues, can we boldly and forcefully move forward an agenda to end domestic abuse.

Continued research is required to provide additional qualitative and quantitative data on the scope, prevalence, nature and implications of domestic abuse in the Jewish community. Studies are needed across all populations including immigrant populations, the disabled, the gay and lesbian communities, the elderly, and especially teens. Only through a clearer understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on Jewish homes and families across all populations can we appropriately prioritize the allocation of critical resources and more strategically address the pressing needs.

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<sup>2</sup> "Professionals" is used here to refer to rabbis, domestic violence professionals, social workers and volunteers who reported on their professional and volunteer experiences with domestic abuse survivors. Specifically, this discussion refers to the data from their identification of the circumstances involved with the last survivor with whom they worked. Similarly, "client" may be used to refer to survivors who accessed their services, although these may be congregants, hotline callers or others who accessed services through various means and in different ways.

Federations and other Jewish philanthropic organizations must provide increased support to programs and agencies addressing domestic abuse, including services for the abuser and the entire family. By increasing funding from the Jewish community, we are better able to encourage the secular community to respond in the same way.

New efforts and new resources need to be targeted toward awareness and prevention, especially for youth, teens and young women. More than half of the participants in the studies worked with teens in prevention and treatment settings and observed that teens are largely uninformed about the nature of abuse, often feeling isolated and unaware of whom to talk to or where to go for help. We must be committed to teaching our youth and young adults about healthy relationships.

Education and prevention efforts should clearly identify and label controlling and threatening behavior especially regarding children as abusive and intervention programs should highlight these behaviors when screening for domestic abuse. Only by using an inclusive definition of abuse are we able to better serve the true population of victims and survivors.

## **Key Finding 2:**

*The myth that Jewish families are immune from abuse allows both Jewish and secular professionals, including police, mental health professionals and medical personnel to miss the cues of abuse.*

Although there has been considerable progress in recognizing and responding to domestic abuse in the Jewish community, clear areas of need remain. These include raising awareness about domestic abuse among professionals in the community at large as well as increasing the availability of resources to meet needs.

The myth that Jewish families are immune from abuse enables a system of missed cues and limited response thereby blocking early intervention. This lack of awareness and denial can be found in both the Jewish and secular communities. Several study survivors shared incidents where physicians, police or social workers did not pick up on cues or probe for abuse, or minimized their complaints.

Professionals agreed that many of their peers need additional training and skills in order to identify and effectively treat or support victims of abuse.<sup>3</sup> They stressed the importance of including domestic abuse in graduate level curricula as well as ongoing training and Continuing Education Credits (CEU) for professionals, social workers, therapists and other mental health professionals.

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<sup>3</sup> One survivor objected to items in the survey regarding "treatment methodologies" in work with survivors. She stated that survivors should not be seen as needing mental health services. While that discussion is largely outside of the scope of this report, the assumption here is that skilled counseling and/or psychotherapy are important to meeting the needs of many survivors.

### **Priorities for Action:**

Raising awareness among professionals and the community at large must be seen as a priority. The belief that Jewish men do not physically abuse their wives, or that middle and upper-middle class Jewish families do not experience acts of abuse must be dispelled. With increased awareness, more opportunities arise for early intervention.

In order to minimize the potential for missing critical cues of abuse, training and CEU credits for both Jewish and secular medical professionals, law enforcement personnel, social workers, therapists and other mental health professionals and other community professionals, including practitioners and service providers, must be made available so that cultural and religious factors do not impede early intervention and assistance. Far too often the opportunity for intervention is missed simply due to the lack of understanding and awareness that abuse occurs in Jewish families.

Domestic abuse in Jewish families should be incorporated into appropriate graduate level curricula while training and CEU credits must be made available and targeted to counseling and educational professionals in the Jewish community. Because educational professionals work closely with women and children, they can serve as valuable resources in prevention and intervention strategies.

### **Key Finding 3:**

*Jewish women often either delay seeking help or do not seek help at all. The shame (shonda) associated with abuse, the fear of losing their children in custody battles, and the lack of access to financial resources for legal fees, housing and other transitional needs represent significant barriers for many women. Too often, a woman may seek help for abuse or decide to leave an abusive relationship only to find many of her needs unmet.*

Survivors agreed that family concerns as well as social and psychological barriers kept them from recognizing or seeking assistance for abuse. The barriers most noted by the study respondents included concerns about disrupting the family and the shame (shonda) associated with domestic abuse, followed by concerns about financial security, concerns about children or custody issues, beliefs that domestic abuse did not occur in Jewish families, personal safety, and lack of personal recognition that the behaviors experienced were actually abusive.

Also reflected under Key Finding 1, nearly all study respondents felt that "threatening to take the children away" was considered abusive and may support the difficulties some Jewish women have when considering whether to seek help.

Survivors noted that women find that many of their needs are unmet, including adequate legal and financial assistance, support from their rabbi and the Jewish community, counseling services for them and their children, child care, job training and transitional housing.

The studies identified a particular need for affordable legal assistance and increased financial support. Although it may appear that Jewish women living middle and upper middle class lives have access to money, abusers often deny their victims access to the family's financial resources. Attorney fees and related court costs are often prohibitive. Resources that would enable women to establish their own households and support their children are scarce. Transitional housing, child care and job training are important and related needs. Participants in the studies noted that a woman often stays in an abusive relationship if she is unable to "have her children taken care of in a way she's comfortable with." These supports can be expensive and long-term.

### **Priorities for Action:**

Increased services should be provided for both the women who choose to remain in their relationships for the long term and those who decide to leave.

A public awareness campaign targeted at the legal community should be implemented and attorneys should be encouraged to provide pro bono and sliding scale legal services for abused women and their children. A guarantee of affordable legal assistance removes one of the barriers to leaving an abusive relationship.

Funds and low-interest loans need to be made available and easily accessible for long-term transitional housing, employment assistance and financial support for victims and their children. Relocating and readjusting to a new life is all too often not a short-term prospect; long-term assistance is required.

### **Key Finding 4:**

*Jewish women do not usually seek emergency shelter and therefore are left alone to negotiate a system of independent and disconnected programs and services.*

Social workers and other domestic abuse professionals in the studies pointed out that there is a limited need for and use of shelter services by Jewish women because when they do decide to leave, they often go to family or friend for the short-term. Because Jewish women do not go to shelters, they cannot access the network of support services normally provided by the shelter. Instead, they are often left alone to negotiate the maze of support services, which can be at the very least discouraging and for some, debilitating.

The studies did, however, confirm that more transitional housing is needed. As one participant who has worked in both Jewish and secular domestic violence agencies reflected, relatively few women from all backgrounds seek shelters for immediate safety needs, but rather, come to shelters when they have decided to leave an abusive relationship and have nowhere else to go. In her experience, which was echoed by others, Jewish women generally are able to find short-term housing with family or friends but the need for longer-term transitional housing was expressed by many of the professionals in the studies.

### **Priorities for Action:**

New ways must be found to increase collaboration and sharing of resources among Jewish and secular organizations. A coordinated community response must be created that provides a network of collaborative support and services among hotlines, mental health professionals, rabbis, lawyers, law enforcement, and health care workers in lieu of the support network that is often provided by a shelter. Only through an integrated support system can we better serve abused Jewish women and their children.

Coordinated community responses must include community-based short- and long-term transitional housing as well as a national network that enables women and children the opportunity to move to safe houses throughout the country and resume their lives in a protected environment. As part of this network, appropriate arrangements must be made with school systems, both religious schools (yeshivot and day schools) and public schools, so that children can easily resume their educations. Assistance in locating employment must also be part of these networked support systems as well as adequate counseling assistance for women and their children. If women are confident that the needs of their children are being met they are more likely to seriously consider leaving their abusive relationship.

### **Key Finding 5:**

*Victims and survivors are much more likely to seek help from their intimate network of friends and family members or private psychotherapists than from any other source.*

The studies found that women were equally likely to turn first to friends or to a private psychotherapist. Significantly smaller numbers contacted domestic abuse hotlines or shelters, Jewish social service agencies, police or a physician. This could be due to a number of reasons including the fact that Jewish women tend to be comfortable talking to a private psychotherapist while they may not be as comfortable revealing or discussing intimate details in any number of settings within the larger social services system. Jewish women also may lack confidence in many of the secular domestic abuse programs and services feeling that the needs specific to Jewish women and their children may be overlooked or misunderstood.

### **Priorities for Action:**

Public awareness programs must be designed and implemented for the entire Jewish community so that friends and family members are able to provide appropriate responses when turned to for help. Through an expanded awareness of domestic abuse, family members and friends will be more likely to recognize early warning signs and better equipped to provide support.

Educational opportunities, training opportunities and continuing education credits on domestic abuse in Jewish families must be made available to professionals, especially psychotherapists in private practice. By understanding that domestic abuse is not primarily just a secular issue, psychotherapists and other professionals may be more alert to the needs of their Jewish clients.

Increased support for domestic abuse hotlines specifically for Jewish women must be made available while expanded training on the special needs of Jewish women and their children is needed for secular domestic abuse hotlines. Through a greater recognition of the signs of abuse and the needs specific to Jewish women and their children, hotlines can better serve as a starting point for information, encouragement and recovery.

### **Key Finding 6:**

*Rabbis play an important role in speaking out about domestic abuse in the Jewish community and in providing support to the victims of abuse and their families. The challenges rabbis face when dealing with domestic abuse within their congregations must be addressed. Jewish women are more likely to go to a rabbi for help and guidance if the rabbi has previously spoken out about the issue.*

The role of the rabbi was seen as important by rabbis and other participants in the studies.

Rabbis and survivors concurred that women sought the help of a rabbi if the rabbi had previously made a public statement about domestic abuse. Rabbis also concurred that when they spoke publicly about domestic abuse they were approached by congregants and others who had a personal experience with the issue. Speaking publicly is a concrete signal to the congregation that the rabbi is aware that domestic abuse does occur in the Jewish community and rabbis who spoke out were more often approached for spiritual guidance, for counseling, and for referrals. Rabbis are often particularly challenged when the abused and abuser are members of their congregation.

Rabbis also felt that they would benefit from training to further help them identify domestic abuse, make appropriate referrals and work collaboratively with domestic abuse specialists. A number of rabbis recommended that a social worker/therapist liaison be made available to provide assistance to both the rabbi and the congregation. This suggests that rabbis would prefer to establish relationships with a specific individual who could provide consultation and to directly refer congregants in need rather than simply have resource lists with agency telephone numbers.

### **Priorities for Action:**

Dialogue with rabbis must continue at all levels of the organized Jewish clergy community to ensure greater understanding of the role of rabbis in dealing with domestic abuse, the challenges rabbis face, and the identification of appropriate ways to support rabbis and their congregations.

Education and outreach to rabbinical students and rabbis is critical. Although many rabbis have already acknowledged that domestic abuse is a significant issue for the Jewish community, they must be encouraged to participate in educational opportunities so that they are more effectively able to face the challenges of dealing with these issues. In addition, rabbis need to be connected to their peers who are experienced with these issues. With increased education and awareness rabbis are more able to serve as advocates and provide resources to their congregations and their communities.

As part of an overall coordinated community effort, a system linking synagogues with individual social workers and therapists should be developed so that the needs of congregants are more easily and effectively supported.

Rabbis of all denominations must be encouraged to take on a greater leadership role by speaking publicly about domestic abuse to their congregations, discussing domestic abuse in pre-marital counseling, and serving as a resource for victims and survivors, their children, their families and the abuser. As the spiritual leaders in the hierarchy of Jewish communities, rabbis are in a position to provide a voice of advocacy and compassion and be part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

## CONCLUSION

### A CALL TO ACTION

Jewish Women International is committed to building a global, collaborative movement to end domestic abuse in the Jewish community. By leading the Jewish community in a global **Call to Action**, JWI will continue to engage in collaborations and partnerships at every level in order to raise public awareness, drive new and increased resources to services and programs that support abused women and children, conduct additional research and develop and implement programs that effectively support our mission to end domestic abuse.

We invite you to join us in a worldwide **Call to Action** by submitting the form found on the following page. One voice, one commitment, one step at a time we will work together to make this world a safer place for all women and children.

# Pursuing Truth, Justice and Righteousness:

## A Call to Action

HELP BREAK THE SILENCE SURROUNDING  
DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

**For generations, the Jewish people have fought bravely to end injustices inflicted upon us by others. But we have also remained silent—about the injustice of violence we inflict upon each other.**

The ethical teachings of our tradition insist upon certain values: B'TZELEM ELOKIM, all human beings are created in the image of the divine; SHALOM BAYIT, safety and peace in the home; TZEDEK, justice and accountability; HESED AND RAHAMIM, lovingkindness and compassion; and TESHUVAH AND TIKKUN OLAM, healing and wholeness, on individual, communal and universal levels.

**And yet, domestic abuse remains a very real problem in the Jewish community.**

We call upon each other and all of the Jewish community to:

1. Replace fear with courage by **acknowledging that domestic violence does exist** in the Jewish community.
2. **Hear and believe those brave survivors** who come forward with their stories.
3. **Confront, combat and prevent abuse**—as a community.
4. **Educate and train religious leaders**—locally, nationally, internationally.
5. End violence before it starts by **teaching young people what a healthy relationship is**—and what it isn't.
6. Develop more resources that offer **shelter, healing, justice and financial security** to abused women everywhere.
7. **Hold abusers accountable:** They, not the victims, should bear the shame.
8. Assertively **seek a level of funding**—from federations, foundations, businesses, congregations, organizations and individuals—that is **proportionate to the size of the problem.**
9. **Rally men around violence prevention** programs: This is not a women's issue, it's a community issue.
10. Use every tool available—print media, web, education, legislation, service agencies and more—to **spread awareness into every corner of the community.**

***Add your voice to our mission:***

**Visit [www.jewishwomen.org](http://www.jewishwomen.org) to sign on to the Call to Action.**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jewish Women International is grateful for the time, talent and wisdom of so many who contributed to the success of the Needs Assessment project and especially to the project's core funders: the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** and the **Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago**.

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Finally, two extraordinary committees directed the Needs Assessment project. Their leadership gave this report its wisdom and its strength. We thank them for their invaluable contribution to the project's success.

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**The Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Chicago Jewish Community**

**Dr. Amy Robbins Ellison**, Board of Trustees, Jewish Women International; **Barbara Engel**, activist; **Dr. David Finn**, Director, Associates in Human Development Counseling, LLC; **Rachel Fleishmann**, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, State of Illinois; **Alison Garber**, Program Associate, Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago; **Hadassah Goodman**, Clinical Supervisor, Jewish Family and Community Service; **Rabbi Irving Glickman**, President, Chicago Board of Rabbis; **Joyce Graczyk**, Crime Victims Coordinator, Council for Jewish Elderly; **Kathryne Harter**, Research Manager, Council for Jewish Elderly; **Laura Kaufman**, Executive Director, Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago; **Heidi Kon**, Director of Education, Chicago Sinai Congregation; **Leslie Landis**, Director, Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence; **Cheryl Leon**, Coordinator, Project Shield; **Rae Luskin**, activist; **Charlotte Mallon**, Assistant Director, Jewish Family and Community Service; **Rabbi Nina Mizrahi**, Director, Pritzker Center for Jewish Education; **Emily Muskovitz**, Grants Research Specialist, Chicago Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence; **Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski**, Executive Director, Chicago Rabbinical Council; **Randy Parks**, Assistant Director, Response Center; **Ed Reed**, Regional Director, Jewish Children's Bureau; **Natalie Ross**, Executive Director, Jewish Family and Community Service; **Pat-Yuzawa Rubin**, Associate Vice President, Grants and Special Projects, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; **Rabbi Paul Saiger**, Director, Hillels of Illinois; **Barbara Siegel**, Clinical Director, SHALVA; **Robin Stein**, Director, Response Center; **Janice Wahnnon**, Executive Director, SHALVA; **Wendy Zimberoff**, Clinical Social Worker, Jewish Children's Bureau.

## **JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES**

Founded in 1897 as Bnai B'rith Women, Jewish Women International (JWI) ascribes to the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* – the concept that humankind has the responsibility to complete and perfect the world. For more than a century, the organization's mission has been to strengthen the lives of women, children and families through education, action and advocacy.

In 1988, JWI sharpened its focus on domestic abuse after a JWI member was murdered by her husband. Although not primarily involved in domestic abuse prior to that event, JWI felt the urgency and the responsibility to respond. At a time when the Jewish community had long been silent about domestic abuse, JWI pushed the discussion into the public arena.

Now, nearly two decades later, JWI continues to dedicate much of its work to addressing the complex issue of domestic violence. JWI initiatives provide the Jewish and secular local, national and international communities with programming designed to educate, inform and challenge the thinking about domestic abuse. JWI efforts have trained professionals, volunteers and advocates, built a collaborative global response to domestic abuse, and produced and disseminated a variety of educational publications and resources. Through an effective network of members, partners and projects, JWI is continually seeking new and effective ways to raise public awareness about domestic abuse and to find and support the solutions necessary to create systemic change.

### **A Call to Action**

In July 2003, JWI convened *Pursuing Truth, Justice and Righteousness: A Call to Action, the First International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community*. Hundreds of activists, domestic violence professionals, rabbis and social workers, from the United States and abroad, gathered in Baltimore, Maryland to shape a Jewish movement to end violence against women. A second International Conference will be held in March 2005 in Washington, DC.

The outcome of the International Conference was a **Call to Action**, a collective vision statement to inspire thought and action in the form of personal commitments to fight domestic violence.

JWI's e-newsletter, *Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, Core Communication for the Jewish Domestic Violence Movement*, links individuals and organizations through enhanced communication about domestic abuse programs and activities taking place throughout the world.

The **Call to Action National Network** is a virtual community forum that provides technical assistance and support to grassroots efforts to end domestic violence in the Jewish community via a series of facilitated conference calls.

**The Needs Assessment: A Portrait of Abuse in the Jewish Community** is a catalyst for deepening conversation, an inspiration for future programming, and an advocate for driving new thinking, new funding, and new resources to the issue of domestic abuse.

## Domestic Violence Programming in the Jewish Community

*Embracing Justice: A Resource Guide for Rabbis on Domestic Abuse* and *Healing and Wholeness: A Resource Guide on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community* are two JWI publications that guide rabbis, professionals and Jewish volunteers in their work to support battered women and their families. The Guides include sample sermons and text studies, tools for talking with survivors and perpetrators, safety planning for abused women, comprehensive lists of resources, and ideas for community response. These publications help frame individual and community responses to domestic abuse that ensure safety, support, healing and justice.

Volunteers play a key role in the distribution of JWI's brochure, *Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community*, which provides information, advice and activities to impact abuse in communities.

*JWI's Resource Directory* is a comprehensive list of local, national and international organizations and programs available in print and on the JWI website. The Resource Directory is used by professionals, volunteers and activists throughout the world.

JWI is the founder, convener and facilitator of **The Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Chicago Jewish Community**. Motivated by a unified commitment to systemically change the way the community as a whole views and reacts to domestic abuse, the Task Force is a coalition of local organizations supporting "Call to Action" activities that include public awareness and acknowledgment and education for youth, clergy, professionals and lay leaders.

**JWI's youth programs**, currently under development, will include a weekend retreat for young leaders, a video on healthy relationships, accompanied by a discussion guide and text based study, and new public awareness material designed for youth.

JWI's **Domestic Abuse Clergy Task Force** is a groundbreaking effort to bring the leadership of the rabbinical community together around the issue of domestic abuse in the Jewish community in order to raise its stature and profile. This interdenominational task force will provide technical assistance that will make the case for pulpit rabbis to assume positions as leaders and advocates for a coordinated community response.

JWI's **Media Advisory Task Force** is composed of a small group of media experts and provides advice and support for JWI's relationships with the media.

**Domestic Abuse is Not Kosher** is a program designed to heighten Orthodox women's awareness about domestic abuse.

## Action, Advocacy and Education

JWI supports over a dozen education, action and advocacy initiatives worldwide revolving around the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and promote the highest form of *tzedakah* (charity) by helping at-risk women and girls become independent and financially secure.

The **Women's Economic Security Fund (WESF)** funds JWI initiatives, and awards non-competitive grants to small, innovative programs sponsored by JWI and other like-minded organizations that give women and girls the resources, skills and education they need to thrive and help survivors of abuse become independent and financially secure. The WESF casts a wide net of support throughout the United States, Canada, Israel, Russia and other countries. Beneficiaries of the WESF in 2003 included: The Ethiopian Girls Project (training for at-risk Ethiopian young women in Israel), The Kehilla Women's Project (a special program of the Kehilla organization in Beit Shemesh, Israel, that provides single mothers and abused women with a comprehensive approach to economic self-sufficiency through critical support and life-skills training), and JWI/Hillel Partnership for Young Women (a series of focus groups of young Jewish women concentrating on the issues of relationships and money).

Award winning *Jewish Woman* magazine, with a circulation of more than 75,000 annually, reflects the mission of JWI by giving women tools to improve their lives. The magazine bolsters readers' emotional, physical and spiritual self-sufficiency by inspiring and teaching them to live richly--no matter their age, tax bracket or marital status. Ten "Women to Watch" are profiled in the fall issue of *Jewish Woman* magazine and honored at a gala luncheon in Washington, DC. **Women to Watch** is an annual celebration of exceptional women who have been inspired by their Jewish values to contribute to contemporary life. Honorees exemplify the spirit of self-determination, personal accomplishment and community advancement that Jewish women have nurtured since the time of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Their breadth of achievements spans art, culture, social action, business, politics, the media, science, music and spirituality. Net proceeds from the event help support the Women's Economic Security Fund.

The **Residential Treatment Center**, located in Jerusalem, Israel, founded over 60 years ago, is JWI's cornerstone program to treat severely emotionally disturbed children who are at risk of perpetuating violence. The RTC provides a comprehensive long-term, drug-free residential treatment program for Israeli boys and girls. Due to the dedicated and committed team of social workers, psychologists, teachers, and staff, a majority of the children at the RTC move on to successfully complete mandatory military service, have families of their own, and lead healthy, productive adult lives. The RTC is known throughout the world for its innovative approach – and 60% success rate.

For more than 100 years, JWI has been a catalyst for social change. **JWI's Advocacy Initiative and Action Alerts** highlight legislation that supports reproductive rights, affordable child-care and gun control, confronts domestic violence, and supports Israel.

**JWI's 135 Chapters** are diverse in age and location but they share the common goal of supporting the mission of JWI. Chapters can be credited with providing a positive social atmosphere for Jewish women, all bound by their love of JWI and dedication to helping women and children in need.

## **Domestic Violence Programming In The Secular Community**

Each Mother's Day, **JWI's Flower Project** provides bouquets of flowers to over 150 battered women's shelters across the United States as a sign of support and encouragement to the women living in these shelters. The Flower Project is conducted in partnership with synagogues, sororities, and college campus Hillels. Donations to the Mother's Day Flower Project underwrite JWI's Women's Economic Security Fund. Corporate sponsors include Calyx and Corolla and Federal Express.

The **JWI Library Project** is designed to enhance the lives of children who are living in shelters by providing them with a comfortable place to read a book, listen to music or watch a video. These are items that are often left behind as women and their children escape from abusive relationships and help provide children with a sense of security in the middle of a traumatic time. By placing libraries in the shelters, we help bring smiles, enjoyment, and enrichment to the unfortunate victims of abuse.

The **Skills for Living Curriculum**, developed in partnership with The House of Ruth, Baltimore, Maryland and My Sisters Place, White Plains, New York, is intended to help direct service providers train at-risk women seeking assistance. The comprehensive curriculum includes sections on parenting, stress management, nutrition, job training, interviewing skills, and financial planning. The Skills for Living curriculum is available for purchase in both print and on CD.

In an effort to help bring domestic violence advocacy to the Former Soviet Union (FSU), JWI, in partnership with Project Keshet, National Council of Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) and the Russian Jewish Congress, created **Project Kolot** (Women's Voices). Project Kolot engaged ethnic and religious communities in the FSU including police, city officials, the legal community, clergy, women's groups and human rights organizations to address the problem of domestic abuse in their cities.

**Creating Success: Russian-English Guide to Financial Security in the USA**, published by JWI in partnership with the National Endowment for Financial Education, is designed to help Russian immigrants adjust to life in the United States. This free guide offers hundreds of useful tips and contact agencies for assistance with budgeting and job searches, financial and career planning and banking basics, as well as up-to-date information on how families and women can protect themselves from domestic violence.

The **Prejudice Awareness Summit (PAS)** is an award winning community collaboration providing day-long facilitated workshops for middle school youth on prejudice prevention and tolerance. Students meet and work directly with peers from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds and leave the summit ready to become leaders in their own schools by creating anti-prejudice follow up activities to engage their classmates.

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