Voices of a Movement: Oral Histories and Archival Research of the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Contextual Frameworks

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Project Background

The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence entered our professional lives via an e-mail request, about two years ago, in 2002. Florence Forshey, a founding member of the Coalition, was searching for an academic institution in Illinois that would be interested in becoming a permanent home for the organization's documents and written materials. She also hoped that someone would be willing and able to conduct oral histories with its founding members.

Dr. Irene Beck's past experiences in conducting life narratives research and writing about women activists encouraged her to save the message and forward it to Dr. Beth Catlett, a close colleague in the DePaul University Women's and Gender Studies Program. With her expertise in domestic violence issues and strong background in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the social sciences, Beth's response was one of genuine interest. We agreed this sounded intriguing and invited Florence to come and talk with us.

Our first meeting whet our appetites—Florence spoke about the practical reasons that were driving her search for an academic institution to partner with ICADV on this project. One of the founding mothers had warehoused some of the organization's written history in her garage for years, but now she and her husband were retiring and moving to Florida—so the boxes had to go. Plus, Florence, said, there were even more cartons stored in Springfield. And, beyond those approximately forty-five boxes, were the voices of the women who had committed the best years of their lives to creating a one-of-a-kind statewide coalition of organizations—ICADV, she told us, is the oldest and one of the largest organizations in the US dedicated to eliminating domestic violence.

Over the next year, we sought institutional support within DePaul University. Our program director, Dr. Ann Russo, was very supportive of our taking on such a research project. She also encouraged us to consider ways in which students could become involved through an innovative community based research project embedded within a
course. Next, we began an extended dialogue with Kathryn DeGraff, director of the Richardson Library Special Collections and Archives. She expressed enthusiasm at acquiring an archive of such a worthwhile activist community advocacy organization, one that lent itself to student access for study. She, in turn, successfully sought and gained, on our behalf, student and staff support to collect and archive the extensive collection of materials.

This past year, Special Collections has taken ownership of the collection and has already organized about half of the materials into files that will eventually become available for interested faculty, students and members of the public community to access in the adjacent reading room. Dr. Beck, with the aid of student research assistants, has begun to research the extensive materials. She and Dr. Catlett have also worked extensively with the archives’ staff to create ways for students in their Winter Quarter classes to conduct individual research projects within a collection that has not yet completed its archival processing.

We envision this research project, including an analysis of the written records, a series of oral histories with key members of ICADV, transcriptions of those conversations, and a monograph describing the history of this significant social movement, will continue for the next several years.

The following pages provide a limited, sketchy working outline of the contextual frameworks surrounding the history of the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence.
Theoretical Views of Violence Against Women

Violence against women began to be considered a serious social problem in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Renzetti et al., 2001). Since then, definitions of violence against women have included emotional, sexual, and physical assault, murder, genital mutilation, stalking, sexual harassment; and prostitution. Significantly, intimate partner violence and rape are the two forms of violence against women that have received the most theoretical analysis.

Early estimates of intimate partner violence suggested that violence against women occurred in one of six couples. More recently, the National Violence Against Women Survey (1997) found that in the prior year, almost two million women were physically assaulted and more than 300,000 women experienced an attempted or completed rape. While research has yielded no definitive solutions to violence against women, researchers have developed theoretical explanations to aid in understanding the problem. By recognizing some risk factors or causes, more effective prevention and intervention programs may be developed.

At the same time, the development of theoretical frameworks for the study of violence against women has helped diminish some myths, that:

- Women really want to be rated
- They ask to be sexually assaulted by dressing and acting provocatively
- Women do something to make their partner angry
- If the domestic violence was as bad as victims claim, they would have left the relationship.

Early research about the issues related to battered women and their experiences was largely unsophisticated by contemporary standards. Much of it was based on historical summaries and interviews of battered women. Most funded researchers were from the discipline of sociology, which perspective may have aided the categorizing of "wife abuse" as a form of "family violence." Such a description cast the focus of domestic
violence as a form of family conflict, a part of a family system, not as instances of violence against women.

This perspective stands in stark contrast to that maintained by many feminists. The typical feminist perspective focuses primarily on the concept of patriarchy and the societal institutions that help maintain it. Feminist analyses of violence against women center on the structure of relationships in a male-dominated culture, on power, and on gender. In this perspective, the main factors that contribute to violence against women include the historically male-dominated social structure and socialization practices teaching men and women gender-specific roles. Feminist theoretical underpinnings also focus on the relationship between the cultural ideology of male dominance and structural forces that limit women’s access to resources. In this framework, violence becomes a method by which to maintain social control and male power over women.

Although varying disciplines have presented competing perspectives on violence against women and correlating public policy reforms, the research area of violence against women has become increasingly narrow and self-referential, according to some contemporary theorists (Dobash & Dobash, 1998). They maintain that whereas much is now made of the notion of multidisciplinary work as opportunities for intellectual innovation, there are, in fact, few chances to undertake such work. Additionally, the research routes across disciplinary lines are neither well worn nor easy to follow.

It is their contention that many different methods must be used in seeking to expand empirical knowledge and theoretical insights; there is no ‘perfect’ method nor one that is always the ‘best’. Instead, there is a wide array of methods that suit the different tasks necessary to make up the whole area of study.

A noble aim that emerges from this perspective is to resist this narrowing intellectual trend by opening for discussion and debate significant issues about the nature and causes of violence across a variety of disciplines that might not otherwise meet. A connecting belief is that empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding must be joint, rather than
separate activities. Theoretical ideas need to be empirically informed, and empirical knowledge needs to have theoretical underpinnings. Following this paradigm, it is important to constructively introduce the ideas, evidence and concerns of each discipline to the other, in the hope that such cross-fertilization will lead to innovations and enhance all of the respective approaches.

**Domestic Violence in Public Context**

Wife beating has apparently existed for centuries across many cultures, but it has only been in the 20th century that social and political changes have occurred to intervene and attempt to prevent its occurrences. One of feminism’s greatest contributions to research on domestic violence (DV) victims may be that it defined wife beating as a social problem, rather than something that particular violent individuals do.

A review of the second part of the 20th century shows that the Battered Women’s movement began in the US in the early 1970s. For the next two decades, shelters for domestic violence victims and their children sprang up in scattered fashion in most major communities across the country. These centers were often run by affiliations among formerly abused women, activists, and veterans of rape crisis centers. In general, such shelters have sought to provide safe spaces, offer victim advocacy, access to legal support, training and education to law enforcement personnel, and participate in both local and wider legal reforms.

The women who organized the first shelters for battered women described themselves as advocates – a term that connotes those who speaks for or take up the cause of another (Renzetti, 2001). The “other(s)” in this context were women who were being beaten by their husbands, lovers, or partners. Many advocates who fought for new institutional responses to battered women had also experienced violence in their own lives. Working in a shelter did not so much require a college degree as a willingness to speak out in institutional environments that were often hostile.
As women filled shelters, they told their stories. In addition to being devastated by the personal betrayal of their abusers, they were further harmed by the countless ways that police officers, clergy, welfare workers, judges, family members, landlords, attorneys, and therapists found to blame them for their partners’ violence. Many advocates noted that the overarching theme of community collusion with batterers was starkly visible. Some called for a paradigm shift. They wanted to train the eye of scrutiny away from a woman’s absence of a “healthy” response to being beaten, onto both the abuser and the institutional practices that failed to help abused women (Renzetti, 2001).

The direction of the Battered Women’s social movement emerged from what women needed:

- To be safe
- Exceptions to legal aid rules that determined a victim’s eligibility through the family’s income level
- New family assistance intake rules that recognized the victims’ need to hide from the abusive father of their children
- Police to keep records of repeated calls to their home.
ICADV: The Birth of a Movement—1978-1998

Note: For Better Times (FBT), the regularly published newsletter/journal of ICADV, has become, for this research project, the primary written source for tracking the history of the organization. Most of the factual information contained in this draft document about ICADV is drawn from FBT’s issues. Other sources of information include written documents in the organizational archives.

In this text, the focus on domestic violence in Illinois centers on 1978, the year that the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) was formed. In that year, according to Vickie Smith, its executive director in 1998, there were very few programs in Illinois that provided shelter for women and children who were victims of domestic violence; they could be found in Carbondale, Elgin, Champaign/Urbana, Chicago and Springfield.

It is striking to note that, akin to the view of Florence Forshey, who first brought ICADV’s history to us, Smith’s telling of its beginnings was intertwined with the actions of a group of key individuals. Smith described the invaluable role of Julie Hamos, current Illinois State Representative, in particular.

Hamos was “a young attorney in Chicago, lobbying for legal services in Springfield,” Smith wrote. “She discovered that Illinois was not using all the Title XX funds for which it was eligible. She contacted some of the women in the state [involved with domestic violence prevention] and called a meeting to discuss the possibility of setting up services for battered women. There were also a couple of attorneys in Chicago who were with a new organization called Chicago Abused Women’s Coalition, who were interested in starting a shelter.”

This one meeting grew into a series of weekend gatherings, attended by directors from the nine agencies that either were already providing shelter services for women and children, or were interested in doing so. Those agencies decided to form the Illinois Coalition against Domestic Violence (ICADV). While their organizational numbers were small at the beginning, the member programs did span the entire state: Alton, Aurora,
Belleville, Carbondale, Centralia, Charleston, Chicago, Elgin, Joliet, and Peoria – in all, they involved urban, suburban and rural regions throughout Illinois.

ICADV described itself from its inception in September, 1978 as a network of people and programs working for better communities by helping families break the cycle of violence. However, ICADV has never sought individual members; rather, it is comprised of member organizations that have provided a broad range of life-protective services for battered women and their children. They have also worked with religious groups, criminal justice agencies, federal and state offices of Human Services, health providers, and civic groups within the member organizations’ local communities.

From the beginning, all its member programs committed, beyond their own organizational goals, to the coalition’s stated aims to:

- Expand and increase services for women in all parts of the state;
- Give domestic violence victims a statewide voice;
- Advocate for public policy changes on these victims’ behalf;
- Educate the public about domestic violence and to expand the responses of local communities to their victims.

These organizational founders, women experienced in dealing with not-for-profit organizations, realized that funding would be a critical component to the Coalition’s ability to survive. They determined that the governor, James Thompson, had discretion to designate funds under Title XX, if the coalition formed a subcontract with a state department. The departments they considered, Mental Health, Children and Family Services, and Public Aid, and the rationale they used to decide with whom they would contract, tells the reader a good deal about the founders’ perspectives on battered women and public funding.

"The Department of Mental Health was rejected because we did not feel that women who were battered were necessarily mentally ill. In fact, there was strong opinion among many in the group that battered women were not mentally ill. We also were very
concerned that battered women would receive a label of mental illness and this in itself would defeat the purpose of providing needed services for this special population. This has been a concerted effort throughout the movement, to make sure that the special circumstances faced by victims of domestic violence not be lost.

“The Department of Children and Family Services was finally rejected after much consideration because there was recognition that not all battered women had children. Therefore, some women might not be eligible for services under this department.

“We settled on the Department of Public Aid, as the last choice. Also, Jeff Miller, who was the Director of the department, was most receptive to working with the Coalition. [However,] being under the Department of Public Aid presented problems. For example, we knew that victims of domestic violence were not all eligible for public assistance. [While] the Department permitted victims of domestic violence to be eligible for funds for these services, Title XX stipulated that we and the Department could not charge for services. We also had to offer comprehensive services, not just “eats and sheets”. These included a twenty-four hour crisis line, counseling and advocacy. These became the basis of our standards for service.

“We were to be paid on a fee for service basis, so we had to determine what that cost would be. We were a group of mostly grass roots level providers, who had little experience in accountability, now expected to follow the rules of a state department. When funding became available in fiscal year 1979 (FY 79), our programs were encouraged to apply for funding. New forms and formulas were developed. As a program director, it took me several days to just get the math correct.” (Smith, 1998)

An historic event occurred in October 1978, when Governor Thompson announced the funding for domestic violence services in Illinois. He was and continued to be very supportive of these services and commended the work being done by ICADV.

With money to underwrite ICADV’s existence, other challenges quickly
emerged. On December 6th of that year, when snow fell six or more inches across the
state, directors of the newly funded programs came by train, bus, and car to the
Presbyterian Youth House in Springfield, with sleeping bags and covered dishes to share
at mealtime. Their purposes were multiple, from learning how to fill out Public Aid forms
in order to bill for services, to meeting and talking with program staff about varying
perspectives. For example, anger toward mental health professionals was apparent, and
many at that meeting believed that domestic violence victims harbored no faults or other
problems.

ICADV staff and members immediately began training and advocacy efforts. They
provided technical assistance workshops and site reviews with each local sub-provider.
A Citizens’ Council on Domestic Violence was formed. Sangamon State University
faculty helped ICADV to develop a computer program for reporting client intake
information. A volunteer Legislative Support Committee was formed to advocate for a
law to protect victims.

On June 25, 1981, House Bill (H.B.) 1619 passed the Illinois House of
Representatives by a vote of 54-0, creating the Domestic Violence Shelter and Services
Fund. The following day, H. B. 1366 was unanimously approved by the State Senate,
enabling domestic violence victims to obtain emergency orders of protection.
Representative Alan Greiman, its chief sponsor, said: “This is the strongest legislation
passed anywhere in the nation. With unique provisions, we expect other states to use it as
a model. This passage was declared to be a truly coalition effort by advocates,
legislators, and the governor. Governor James Thompson signed H.B. 366 into law on
Sept. 24, becoming effective on March 1, 1982.

This forward movement of events in support of domestic violence victims in Illinois is
even more remarkable considering the national context of that time: President Ronald
Reagan’s budget cutbacks threatened protective services to women and families at every
level across the country.
Legal issues arose: some of the funding for the domestic violence service programs had been coming from a portion of the Illinois marriage license and divorce fees. However, by 1982, this funding was challenged in court. In February, 1986, such funding was declared unconstitutional. So during that year, ICADV advocates and attorneys collaborated to rewrite the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. Governor Thompson signed it into effect in August, 1986.

Facing these and many other issues, ICADV expanded steadily. Within five years, it had grown to include 44 organizations united in a strong statewide effort to eliminate domestic violence in Illinois.

Its major accomplishments cited in its Five-Year Report (1983) highlighted the widespread respect and support ICADV and its member programs had gained, including such major funding sources as the State of Illinois and many local United Way agencies. It was proud of its abilities to increase the public's attention to the widespread incidence and very serious nature of domestic violence. It also described its major role in the creation of an important law to assist and protect victims: the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. Although many vital services had gotten underway across the state, ICADV recognized that some areas were still without access to domestic violence services reasonably close to home, and on an even larger scale, domestic violence remained a largely hidden crime.

So, in addition to continuing its expansion of services for domestic violence victims in Illinois, with a primary focus on battered women and their children, ICADV outlined specific action-oriented goals:

- Develop research and data collection systems which document the nature, scope and impact of service provision as well as the character and extent of domestic violence
- Conduct statewide advocacy for public policy changes which affect domestic violence victims
• Offer statewide education efforts designed to inform the public, specific groups and agencies about the nature of domestic violence and its effects on individuals, families and society.

By 1992, ICADV had continued to grow both in membership and services. It was sub-contracting with 48 local organizational providers, and obtaining approximately $10 million dollars of state and federal funds. Locally, programs were raising approximately the same amount in order to meet their budgets.

The Coalition’s vision and strategies in accomplishing as much as it did, were outlined in FBT:

• ICADV is directed by the vision of ending violent family relationships through victim empowerment, community involvement and statewide networking.

• It promotes a service philosophy which encourages member programs to work cooperatively with a domestic violence victim, enhancing her ability to take charge of her own life.

• It requires that funded domestic violence programs demonstrate networking, community education and involvement on a local level. ICADV member programs have developed a broad base of individuals and organizations that contribute volunteer time, resources and support toward the prevention and elimination of domestic violence in Illinois communities.

• It draws on the resources of members through structured participation on its board of directors, committees, workshops, training and conferences. This perception builds knowledge and skills and enhances commitment, coordination and accountability.

Within its first fifteen years, ICADV had formed enduring ties with many community entities, collaborating in varied ways, such as with:

• IL Commission on the Status of Women
• IL Federation of Women’s Clubs
• IL NOW
• IL Coalition of Women Against Rape
• Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network
• IL Association of Chiefs of Police
• IL Sheriff’s Association Prevention Resource Center.

As partnering efforts, ICADV created the IL Interfaith Committee on Domestic Violence, which later was sponsored by the IL Conference of Churches. ICADV Law Enforcement and State’s Attorneys Advisory Committees met regularly to continually heighten awareness of and form effective responses to domestic violence victims’ needs as they relate to criminal justice and legal sectors in Illinois.

In the midst of all these expansive efforts across the state, a major sea change occurred for ICADV. By FY 93, the State of Illinois and its Department of Public Aid decided to no longer contract with ICADV. This caused the Coalition to examine its future direction. It vowed to continue to exist, with its mission unchanged: to help the battered women and children of Illinois. Technical assistance and training for programs, as well as public education have remained ICADV’s top priorities.

Beyond the scope of ICADV and past the politics of the Illinois government’s financial cutbacks a decade ago, two events occurred which have been noted as promoting very dramatic changes in the battered women’s movement. Both happened in 1994. The first was a sensational trial in California in which the former partner of a domestic violence victim was accused of her murder. The second event was the passage of the federal Violence Against Women Act. Both heightened public and professional awareness of domestic violence as a social issue that must be addressed.

The following pages show the location and identities of the ICADV member organizations’ sites across Illinois.
green = late 1970s
red = early-mid 1980s
blue = early Chicago programs
Late 1970’s
Oasis Women’s Center
Alton IL 62002

Mutual Ground, Inc.
Aurora IL 60507

Women’s Crisis Center of Metro East
Belleville IL 62222

The Women’s Center
Carbondale IL 62901

People Against Violent Environments
Centralia IL 62801

Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Charleston IL 61920

Community Crisis Center
Elgin IL 60120

Groundwork
Joliet IL 60435

Tri-County Women Strength
Peoria IL 61612
Early 1980’s- Mid 1980’s

Cairo Women’s Shelter, Inc.
Cairo IL 62914

Family Rescue
Chicago IL 60617

Stopping Women Abuse Now (SWAN)
Clay City IL 62824

Dove Domestic Violence Program
Decatur IL 62521

Safe Passage, Inc.
DeKalb IL 60115

Kankakee county coalition Against Domestic Violence
Kankakee, IL

Quanada
Quincy IL 62301

Hope of Rochelle
Rochelle IL 61068

COVE/YWCA
Sterling IL 61081

YWCA / VOICES Domestic Violence Program
Freeport IL 61032
ORIGINAL CHICAGO LOCATIONS

Chicago Abused Women Coalition
Chicago IL 60647

Family Rescue
Chicago IL 60617

Harriet Tubman Shelter
Chicago IL 60609

LOOP-YWCA Women's Services
Chicago IL 60603

Neopolitan Lighthouse
Chicago IL 60608

Rainbow House/Arco Iris
Chicago IL 60629

United Charities - Midway Center
Chicago IL 60629

Uptown hull house

Sarah's Inn
Oak Park IL 60304