

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE MILITARY

By Stephanie Mines, Ph.D.

The truth about our culture lives in our children. The truth about war lives in the lives and bodies of the children of those engaged in war. In the Armed Forces of America, the rate of domestic violence is more than double that of the civilian population. Each week someone dies at the hands of a relative in uniform.

Why is there almost nothing in place to stop the rise of the war going on in military homes? The civilian population is reported to have 3.1 incidents of domestic violence per 1,000 people. In the military that rate in 2001 was 16.5 per thousand. (These reported incidents are considerably less than the number of incidents that actually occur.) The children of our military families learn the lessons of terror in their own living rooms, without turning on the television.

The February 2001 report to Donald Rumsfeld from the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence made it clear that services to prevent the escalation of domestic violence within the Armed Forces were thoroughly insufficient (see especially pg. 21 of the report, and inter alia). They still are. The report recommended that the Department of Defense "require the investigation of every reported incident of domestic violence." If this had been honored, Shalamar Franceschi would be alive today. Her husband Damian had already been accused of raping and kidnapping his wife before he murdered her, while holding his mother-in-law and young son at gunpoint. Francheschi's commanding officer was notified of these crimes prior to the killing, but did nothing to punish or restrict him.

The report to Rumsfeld, in fact, included information from a site visit to Ft. Bragg where Mrs. Francheschi was murdered a year later, along with several other military wives whose husbands had just returned from combat.

The Task Force recommendations were good ones: to follow through on all reports of domestic violence, develop standards for commanding officers to protect families whenever allegations of domestic violence had been made, create a comprehensive database identifying batterers, require intervention for those who are at risk for battering, and formulate prevention strategies. But less than half the bases in the US have followed through. No one seems to care. Military families are abandoned by the infrastructure and discouraged from reporting or revealing their experiences of violence and abuse. On the contrary, the forceful arm of the military pressures them into denial.

Agitated and traumatized soldiers become violent because, paradoxically, this provides their halcyon moment. Battle is the environment that gives them identity, so they create a battleground at home after they have been discharged or when they are on leave. The American military, unlike Canada which offers returning soldiers a debriefing period, provides no transition before re-entry. Soldiers (particularly those who were already at risk for violent behavior) are inundated with nervous system disorientation that they do not understand once outside the combat zone. They behave like the teenagers who feel better when they cut themselves. By enacting their rage and pain they briefly lessen their anxiety. (We have to ask, on what battleground are these teenagers living.)

Unresolved traumatic re-enactment leading to familial violence is the core of the transmission of intergenerational suffering and war is its epicenter. I have seen the pattern in my own life and in the lives of countless people in over twenty years of practice as a therapist. During his service in the Army in World War II, my father reactivated a childhood head injury that went undiagnosed and untreated. When he returned to our small apartment in the Bronx, the only outlet for the barrage of impulses he felt was in the abuse of his family. It took me years of study and research to discover that my father's behavior was caused by his neurological disabilities. I, as a child, paid the price for the adults' lack of awareness. But we are no longer doomed by fate or ignorance to pass the lineage of violence on to our children. Therefore I have discovered tools that families can use to identify shock and prevent it spreading, like a toxic oil spill.

I say this not as a victim but as a psychologist aware that my family was never offered any therapeutic counsel. This was the sad situation sixty years ago. Why is it still true today? This question must be raised in the names of the victims where family abuse is occurring right now and for those families where abuse will occur as more and more troops return from Iraq and Afghanistan. This wound is bleeding internally and must be exposed in order to be treated. At last we actually have the resources to end this cycle. The challenge is to use them.

The Lautenberg Law and the Department of Defense directive that demands that soldiers with a prior record of domestic violence or a restraining order against them be prohibited from carrying a gun are important mandates but they are not being heeded. Commanding officers just don't take them seriously. The Domestic Violence Task Force is still investigating who should be responsible for enforcing the Lautenberg Law. These documents, like so many others, create an illusion of concern, a poor substitute for action.

The history of delay and resistance to establishing effective protections to shelter children from domestic terror, suggests strongly that change will not be initiated from above, or by the powers that be. The movement to free military families from their burden of suffering must be initiated from within those families. This is the feminine perspective. Change does not come from the outside. Every woman knows this.

I propose that breaking the lineage of war-induced shock requires that we, the survivors, intervene ourselves - in our own lives, in the lives of our families, whenever we can, using clear and wise outreach. Despite the rhetoric about patriotism, the patriarchal

establishment profits from war and has no true caring for the fighters and their families. This is illustrated in countless ways such as the consistent reduction in services to our armed forces.

What we have failed to come to grips with as a culture is that war creates such personal and social distortions and spiritual chaos that it is impossible to "return to normal" after being at war. The blood and terror drip year after year, long after the war ends, like an intravenous feeding tube filled with poison. War and shock are synonymous.

Yes, services are necessary. Yes, the communities that live on our Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine bases have to be connected to the agencies in their contiguous communities that can support victims and provide treatment for perpetrators. Yes, soldiers who are in violation of the Lautenberg Law must be identified so that they will not be handed a gun. But above all we have to face the magnitude of spiritual injury that anyone exposed to war endures and provide the magnitude of healing necessary.

The tragedy is that resources for supporting our troops are being cut just as effective treatment interventions are becoming available. The war in Vietnam resulted in the first identification of post-traumatic stress disorder. The healthcare community rallied with a broad spectrum of options for recovery. We now know much more about the treatment of shock than when my father came home from war. The purpose of this article is to point the way to these resources so they can get to the people who need them. There is no point in keeping them secret or restricting them to an elite professional community.

My friend Steve's story is not atypical. Steve returned from the war in Vietnam a broken man. Like my dad, his childhood head injury had been reactivated without acknowledgement or treatment. He did not abuse his children but in many regards he was physiologically forced to abandon them as he struggled to find stability and sanity. Just as he was on the brink of experiencing a sense of true confidence in his recovery last year, Steve died in a sudden, horrible accident. Thus, Steve's three children were, in the end, completely robbed of a father. This is but one of millions of stories of how each war deposits its layers of repeated and ongoing human destruction. More Vietnam vets have now committed suicide than were killed in the war itself.

It is time for us to learn how to heal ourselves.

## **HOW TO HEAL**

Today we know that it is possible to heal from overwhelming experience. Such healing requires:

\*Restoration of adrenal health. This means relaxing the kidney-adrenal system, encouraging it to find its own internal balance and calm. Energy medicine is perhaps the most effective tool for this crucial regeneration, along with appropriate nutrition, environment and support. There are specific interventions designed to access energetic resources that have been known for centuries to heal adrenal exhaustion.

\*The differentiation between past and present and the communication of that differentiation to the primitive or survival brain. This is the work of the inner witness, the neutral voice we all can discover that identifies and sorts experience.

\*The opening of the heart to compassion, forgiveness, self love and spirit. This is a spiritual journey and there are many practices that offer direction and fulfillment on this essential path. In the resources listed at the end of this article, I cite Ed Tick. He is the master at guiding spiritual recovery from the horrors of war.

\*A careful understanding of each individual's physiological responses, including the accurate evaluation of intracranial damages, immune system health, and hormonal or nervous system behavior. On the physical level we need the tools of the allopath for reference, along with clear holistic medical evaluations.

Anyone can learn to assess these conditions and to use both energy medicine and dialogue to instill vitality wherever depletion or disorganization is present. My book *We Are All in Shock: How Overwhelming Experience Shatters Us and What We Can Do About It* (New Page Books, 2003) is virtually a compendium of tools in this regard. Simple educated touch, administered by family members to each other, can beckon the nervous system, incrementally, towards balance, completely eliminating panic attacks and obsessive behavior. To learn about the use of energy medicine in this regard, consult my book or contact me directly at Tara-Approach@prodigy.net. If you are a member of a military family, or if you know that war trauma has shaped your life and the lives of your family members, you can become proactive in the recovery process. Please note that all proceeds from the sales of my books and materials benefit community outreach to populations in need.

Each one of us has the capacity to end the lineage of violence. We must act, even when our actions seem small. Every effort to transmit information, to help a child, to assist a family at risk, to provide shelter from domestic violence, or to educate in any way about healing will and does make a difference. I would like to memorialize the murdered women at Fort Bragg and their children by directing our attention to what we can do to BE the change. This article implores you not to depend on external authorities but to use your own wisdom to prevent violence, protect children and regenerate.

We can educate ourselves to be advocates for the resolution of war trauma and the prevention of domestic violence in the military. The benefit of the suggestions in my book is that they are holistic, comprehensive and immediately accessible. While I am a strong advocate for peace and non-violence and the end of all war, I know that the damages of war are with us now. We have a responsibility to care for the wounded in our midst, including ourselves.

Stephanie Mines, Ph.D.

Author of WE ARE ALL IN SHOCK: How Overwhelming Experience Shatters Us and What We Can Do About It (New Page Books, 2003).

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#### **Other Resources:**

Ed Tick, Ph.D.

[www.mentortheoul.com](http://www.mentortheoul.com)

Ed Tick focuses on the treatment of war related trauma. His book Sacred Mountain: Encounters with the Beast documents his work with Vietnam veterans. He offers a broad spectrum of therapeutic services for survivors of war trauma. Ed is the author of numerous books and articles on this subject and he offers workshops, retreats and treatment. He is deeply committed to this service. He does it not only with great intelligence but, more importantly, he does it with all his heart.

Survivors Take Action Against Abuse by Military Personnel ([www.staaamp.org](http://www.staaamp.org)) offers a hotline (1-937-879-2568) and other supportive resources through its website.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault ([www.ncdsv.org](http://www.ncdsv.org)) offers a hotline (1-800-799-SAFE). Under "Services" on this website, you can click "MILITARY LINKS" and find a process model for more effectively addressing domestic violence in the military.

The Miles Foundation

[www.milesfoundation.org](http://www.milesfoundation.org)

The denial within the military of the epidemic of domestic violence and its impact on children is illustrated by the attempt to report a decrease in domestic violence statistics. However, Kate Summers, Director of Services at the Miles Foundation, says that the Department of Defense simply changed their methods of counting. The Miles Foundation is perhaps the only organization providing real help to military families dealing with abuse, and in return the Department of Defense describes them as "unpatriotic."

The Unseen Costs of War

For information about conferences on the unseen costs of war and to talk to others interested in tracking and recording the effects of intergenerational war-based trauma, contact Jon Aguilar: [jon@unseencostsofwar.org](mailto:jon@unseencostsofwar.org). The website is [www.unseencostsofwar.org](http://www.unseencostsofwar.org).

#### **Books, articles:**

Mines, Stephanie, War and the Body, *Massage and Bodywork Magazine*, September 2003.

Mines, Stephanie, A Basic Handbook of Treatment for Symptoms Resulting from Domestic Violence, available from the TARA Approach. Also available electronically. Contact Dr. Mines at [Tara-Approach@prodigy.net](mailto:Tara-Approach@prodigy.net).

Nelson, T.S., *For Love of Country*, Haworth Press, 2002.

Tick, Ed, *War and the Soul*, (Quest, 2005 - in preparation).