



## The Uncomfortable Truth<sup>©</sup> Project

By: Pete Navratil, LCSW-R, ACSW, CASAC

### Introduction

Men's Violence Against Women (MVAW) in the United States has led to the creation of more than 2,000 community-based domestic violence programs providing emergency shelter to approximately 300,000 female victims and their children every year. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports 1,200 deaths and two million injuries to women from intimate partner violence each year. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that, on average, four to five husbands or boyfriends murder their female partners each day in this country. More than 15 million children in the United States are exposed to parental domestic violence and about 800,000 children experience abuse or neglect each year. Additionally, men are responsible for another 230,000 sexual assaults each year. According to recently published research, Men's Violence Against Women (physical, sexual and emotional abuse) is not only traumatic, it is also a leading cause to an array of health problems, ranging from depression to diabetes to premature death and suicide. MVAW also adds some \$100 billion a year to the Nation's health care costs.

The overwhelming majority of this violence is perpetrated by Men. In fact, in 1995 the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) was created as a component of the U.S. Department of Justice. OVW provides national leadership in developing the nation's capacity to reduce violence against women and is responsible for implementing the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). (Interestingly, Men are not referenced directly in the Act.) So there is a whole lot of work going on to eradicate Men's Violence Against Women (MVAW).

### Preface to "Stand Up Guys" (Hank Shaw)

Before there were *Stand Up Guys* there were *Stand Up Women*. And they proved to anyone with an open mind that courage and determination are the traits of great people, not just great men. Stand Up Guys everywhere salute these women for their leadership, world changing accomplishments, and undying commitment to the cause of gender equality and social justice. "They put their shoulders to the mountain... And the mountain moved!"

### What is "Stand Up Guys"?

Stand Up Guys formed in 2004 with the goal of engaging men and women to stand together and speak out to prevent gender-based violence before it occurs. Today we are at the top of a "Tipping Point" in a social change process and it is incredible to observe more and more men willing to Stand Up and Speak Out about men's violence against women and children and reinforce what most well intentioned guys already know! Through prevention education and awareness programs, we work to educate boys, girls, young men, young women and adults of all ages about the attitudes and values that contribute to the abuse of women and children.

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### **Where are the voices of Men weighing in on this?**

Women have been advocating, literally screaming, about this for decades/centuries. They have been busy raising awareness, teaching their fellow sisters how to create safety plans, creating shelter and sanctuary for women and their children. Men have created the image that this is a victim issue not a perpetrator issue. That is why most of the response to MVAW is shrouded in victim services: screening and intervention for detecting it, specialized courts to provide orders of protection, special grants to encourage law enforcement to arrest, shelters to provide safety, abuse hotlines, even mandated child abuse reporting requirements as well as counseling to address the long term psychological consequences of trauma and victimization. Men's violence against women and children is by design "***a women's issue***".

### **A Women's Issue?**

The idea that this is a women's issue distracts us and helps pave the way to the most frequently asked, and very misguided, question: "*Why doesn't **she** just leave?*". This is not a simple solution, it is a daunting choice that is emotionally charged, complicated, and confusing, particularly if there are children involved. When she doesn't just leave we immediately question her inability or "failure" to protect her children. When a man abuses a woman, she is left with all the responsibility and consequences of choosing to stay or leave. For an abused women, this is an enormously overwhelming dilemma. For men, abusive behavior generally goes unchallenged with little or no naturally occurring mechanisms of accountability. Men abuse because they can. Simply put, men rarely hold other men accountable for being abusive!

### **A Men's Issue?**

This leads us to the next equally important questions that rarely ever get asked in relation to women and children: "*Why doesn't **he** stop being abusive?*" Or the most important question of all "*Why does **he** need to be abusive?*" If we take the time to ask these questions, then we balance the issue and make Gender-Based Violence a "***man's***" issue too. Something we, collectively as human beings, can address as a "***community issue***".

### **Why do we need Stand Up Guys?**

The time has come for more of us men to stand up and get involved. It seems clear to me – this all goes away when men hold other men accountable for their abusive behavior. When men develop the courage to teach other men and boys not to be abusive and start talking to their children and friends about the true meaning and values regarding masculinity and what it truly takes to be a "***Real Man***". Men need to reinforce the value of partnership and role-model healthy relationships. Men need to share with other men and boys the *Uncomfortable Truth*<sup>®</sup> that gender-based violence: sexual assault, physical and emotional abuse (domestic violence), harassment, bullying and stalking, result in serious physical injury, including homicide, and psychological injury, resulting in long term trauma, negatively impacting children with consequences that not only last a life time, but impact on generations to come.

As a society, we need to begin to address the question: "***Why does he need to be abusive?***"

### **About Pete Navratil:**

*A clinical social worker in private practice with Tree of Hope Counseling, PLLC and a consultant with Resolve of Greater Rochester, Inc., Navratil has worked with domestic violence victims and perpetrators for 3 decades. His work with perpetrators and his compassion for the plight of survivors inspired him and co-founders, Jack Brennick and Hank Shaw, to develop **Stand Up Guys** in Rochester, NY, in 2004.*