



STOP ABUSIVE AND VIOLENT ENVIRONMENTS

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RE: Reckless and False Statements Made to the Senate Judiciary Committee by Dr. Phillip McGraw

July 22, 2011

Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee

Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

Stop Abusive and Violent Environments – SAVE – is a victim advocacy organization working for evidence-based solutions to domestic violence. We are writing in regard to the recent July 13, 2011 Judiciary Committee hearing on the Violence Against Women Act.

To place this important issue in proper context, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control has conducted two national surveys about intimate partner aggression:

- A survey of high school students found 10% of teenage girls had initiated dating violence, compared to only 9% of teenage boys.ⁱ
- A study of persons 18-28 years old concluded that females were the perpetrators in 70% of cases of one-way aggression.ⁱⁱ

These government findings have been confirmed by over 250 scholarly investigations that show “women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The problem of female-initiated domestic violence recently made front-page news with the recent California case in which a woman hideously drugged, bound, and castrated her husband.^{iv}

Against this background of research and national news, Dr. Phillip McGraw (a.k.a. “Dr. Phil”) was invited to be the lead witness for the recent Judiciary Committee hearing on the Violence Against Women Act.^v

During the course of his testimony, Dr. McGraw repeatedly made statements that were one-sided, misleading, unverifiable, and/or demonstrably false:

1. “2,000,000 women a year are victimized [by] being beaten, terrorized, and intimidated.” – This statement, based on research conducted by Murray Straus at

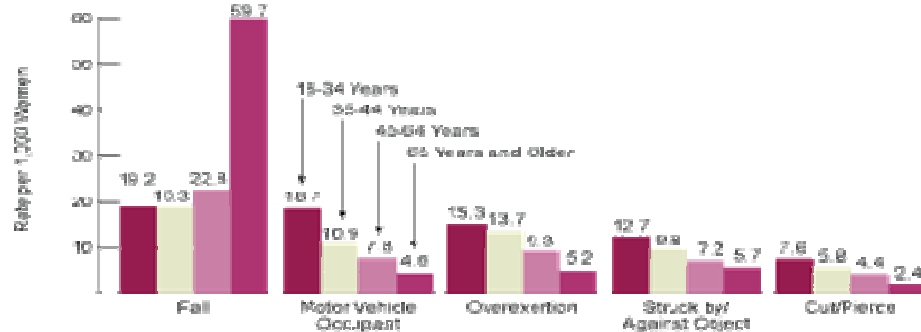
the University of New Hampshire, found equal numbers of men were also victimized by domestic violence. Why did Dr. McGraw choose to cherry-pick the research?

2. *“In too many situations violence against women, young and old, is almost treated as an ‘acceptable crime.’”* This statement is misleading and false. Research shows the vast majority (nine out of 10) of Americans view wife-beating as unacceptable.^{vi} (Ironically, two out of 10 of persons still view domestic violence against men as acceptable.)

3. *“Domestic violence is now the most common cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44.”* –This statement, which has been previously refuted by a leading family violence researcher,^{vii} is a scurrilous misrepresentation of the facts. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control:
 - a. In 1996, motor vehicle accidents and accidental falls were the leading causes of injury to women ages 15-44. Domestic violence ranked as the ninth cause of injury.^{viii}
 - b. From 2004-2007, the leading causes of injury to women 15-24 years of age were falls, motor vehicle accidents, and overexertion, in that order. For women in the 25-44 year age group, the leading causes of injury were falls, overexertion, and motor vehicle accidents.^{ix}

Leading Causes of Injury* Among Women Aged 18 and Older, by Age, 2006

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control



*All of the leading causes of injury in 2006 were unintentional

4. *“In fact, among teenage girls who are killed, nearly one-third is killed by a boyfriend or former boyfriend”* – SAVE staff undertook an extensive search to locate the source of this statement, including the FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports. The source could not be located. Therefore, we conclude this unverifiable claim is a “factoid from nowhere.”

5. Through use of gender-biased examples and terminology (e.g., “women,” “mothers,” “girls,” etc.), Dr. McGraw painted a picture of domestic violence that is oblivious to three decades of research, which shows approximate symmetry in the perpetration of intimate partner aggression between men and women.
6. Dr. McGraw’s testimony often relied on emotion-laden phraseology and photographic images that were designed to play on persons’ feelings and passions.

In conclusion, Dr. McGraw’s testimony was systematically biased, scientifically deficient, and deeply flawed. *His testimony is reminiscent of the Jim Crow rape scares that focused on black-on-white rape, while studiously ignoring the problem of white-on-white sexual assault.*

Effective policy-making rests on sound research and unbiased evidence. Dr. McGraw’s statements are reckless because they could serve to justify and promote federal abuse-reduction policies that are ineffective, neglectful of civil rights, and even harmful.

SAVE’s report, *Most DV Educational Programs Lack Accuracy, Balance, and Truthfulness*, documents how many claims by representatives of domestic violence organizations lack any basis in scientific fact.^x Ensuring the accuracy of domestic violence statements made to policymakers, the public, and criminal justice personnel should be an important public policy objective.

We are therefore requesting that the Senate Judiciary Committee correct the numerous misleading, unverifiable, and erroneous statements of fact that permeate Dr. McGraw’s testimony. We furthermore request that the Judiciary Committee give consideration to the VAWA reauthorization including provisions to require third-party accreditation of all government-supported domestic violence training, education, and public awareness programs.

We look forward to working with you during the upcoming months to assure the prompt reauthorization and revitalization of the Violence Against Women Act.

Sincerely,

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SAVE is a 501(c)3 victim-advocacy organization working for evidence-based solutions to domestic violence.

Cc: All Members of the Senate

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- ⁱ www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5905a1.htm
- ⁱⁱ <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/97/5/941>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm>
- ^{iv} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/12/catherine-kieu-becker-cut-off-husbands-penis_n_895771.html
- ^v <http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=3d9031b47812de2592c3baeba61af68b&witid=3d9031b47812de2592c3baeba61af68b-1-1>
- ^{vi} <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/V70-Gender-symmetry-PV-Chap-11-09.pdf>
- ^{vii} <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/factoid/factoid.html>
- ^{viii} <http://www.responsibleopposing.com/facts/leadcaus.html>
- ^{ix} www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_241.pdf , Table 4.
- ^x <http://www.saveservices.org/downloads/SAVE-DV-Educational-Programs>