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FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND ABROAD

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It is not atypical here that when we are talking about family violence, I am the only man sitting here, and in the afternoon when we will be talking about the law and tough things, then there will be mostly men sitting around.

Research indicates that family violence has become a topic of growing concern in the United States in the last two decades, while in Germany in this respect, we are a little bit underdeveloped because we did not research family violence until very recently. On the other hand, in the area of gun control, I think Germany is really a highly developed country, and so it is somewhat curious for me to talk about family violence in the United States, where you have much more information and much more research done; I think I can contribute, nevertheless, something for your better understanding of the problem.

I will describe to you some insights from a victimization survey, but I will not relate it to the topic of gun control, because German research does not connect domestic violence with gun use, but instead shows the number of homicides related to gun use, and this number is very, very low in Germany, because we have very restrictive laws regarding gun use and bearing guns.

What I will point out now is that our research has been successful in overcoming some serious shortcomings of numerous prior crime surveys, especially serious shortcomings in relation to estimated prevalence of domestic violence in general. These shortcomings also apply to the National Crime Survey of the United States, which is the world's biggest and most expensive victim survey, and to the British Crime Survey and International Crime Survey.

At first glance it might seem astonishing to you that I would relate nonlethal domestic violence to gun control, but there are several reasons. Research on family homicide since Wolfgang's classical Philadelphia study in 1950s has demonstrated quite clearly that domestic killings never occur without warnings. Nonlethal violence precedes domestic homicide in nearly all cases we know about. Furthermore, research on the availability of guns on a micro level, for example, research conducted by Dr. Kiliman

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here in the United States, has clearly shown that availability of guns in the home greatly increases the likelihood that domestic disputes and quarrels will end up in killings if there has been a history of nonlethal violence.

And what should be borne in mind also, in my opinion, following the results of Zeser, criminologist in Germany, and similar results of American research, such as, for example, Mr. Getten in the United States, "Death blows in a domestic setting are usually the end in a long history of tension which often has even been previously known to the police but where no adequate intervention before has been undertaken."

On the side of the offender, very often we have observed that the killing itself is realized by him with a shock. It is often his intention to violate the victim but not necessarily to go so far as to kill the victim. Domestic killing is a kind of escalating violent encounter which could have been prevented and which, in many respects, is different from the instrumental use of weapons, for example, in the area of bank robbery or organized crimes.

Last, but not least, we should remember that violence is a kind of acquired, learned behavior. Being a victim at the hand of your own parents as a child, witnessing parental violence, and growing up in a society where there is a cultural cloak of violence sometimes masked in the justification of self-defense, all this contributes to the development of domestic violence in adulthood. This reasoning leads me to the following three theses: First, domestic homicide can be prevented by timely and adequate intervention in cases of nonlethal violence. Second, the reduction of gun availability—and I think it is the availability, not only the control, especially in family settings where there is a high level of marital discord or previous violent encounters—reduces the risk of domestic violence that end up in killings. And third, the demonstration of societal disapproval through the prevention of nonlethal domestic violence and the reduction of gun availability will also reduce violence outside domestic settings.

Now, the development of effective strategies to prevent domestic violence is directly linked to information about the prevalence of domestic violence, the reasons why people do not look for help in such cases very often, and a thorough understanding of the victim's needs and wishes. Without such information, help and intervention strategies will not be accepted and will fail. Furthermore, since all preventive efforts will cost a lot of money, domestic violence must be recognized as a serious social problem.

The discussion about crime, especially in Germany, focuses on crimes against individuals outside their homes, on the streets, by offenders they do not even know. Research should offer the possibility to estimate the importance of domestic violence in relation to nondomestic violence, its

scope and magnitude, and to recognize domestic violence as a social and criminal policy issue of very high importance. It is more important, with respect to numbers of the people affected, than violence outside home.

It is quite clear from previous research that police statistics cannot offer such insights about the prevalence of domestic violence because most of the incidents are not reported to the police. In addition, in Germany, some of those which are reported are not recorded adequately because they are viewed by the police officers as a kind of private matter.

Victim surveys are seen as one means to overcome this bias of police statistics. However, since the beginning of victim survey research in the late 1960s here in the United States, researchers again and again have pointed out that violent crimes committed by nonstrangers are not identified reliably by the victim survey measures. Biderman, an American researcher and one of the pioneers in the development of the U.S. National Crime Survey, mentioned this problem in 1975, and since then, new research has stressed this fact. Gottfredson, a well-known criminologist, has noted that because of this shortcoming, the picture of the social and special correlations of violent criminal victimization will be seriously distorted.

On the other hand, there is a growing body of research on family violence, including two national surveys which were verified in the United States in 1975 and 1985. The work on this survey led to the development of methodologies which allow us to identify the victims of intrafamily violence more reliably. Unfortunately, these two lines of research, criminological victim survey research and research on family violence, have not been integrated and linked with each other, despite the fact that both address behaviors that clearly meet legal definitions of violent behaviors, like simple assault.

The result of the aforementioned failure of the victimization surveys to address the issue of domestic violence correctly is a distorted picture of the size of the problem. And this is a serious problem since this very costly research could offer much more insight to the sociodemographic effects of domestic violence and would have the potential to give us good information about the historical development of violence in domestic settings.

In our victim surveys, we try to integrate both these approaches. I think we are, for the first time, able to estimate the rate of domestic violence, based on data from a crime survey, and at the same time—a point I want to stress—able to estimate how seriously the results of the previous victim surveys, which did not specifically address domestic violence, might be affected. With respect to this estimation of the distortion of data from the usual crime surveys, the results were very

striking to us. Using developed research strategies to address domestic violence, we made a special drop-off questionnaire which led to an increase for the victimization rate estimates of between forty and eighty percent, depending on the measures used and the subtle relation focused upon.

In light of these findings, we can argue that previous victimization surveys heavily underestimate the victimization risk, especially of women and elderly people, because they fail to adequately capture victimization in domestic settings. Usually, victimization surveys indicate lower victimization rates for women than for men. Now, when we integrate this victimization in domestic settings, quite the opposite is true. The more serious a violent incident is and the closer the relationship between victim and offender is, the more likely is it that the victim is a female. Most of these victimization experiences are neither reported to the police nor reported to the victimization survey interviewers in the conventional victimization survey. The violent victimization in domestic settings is far greater than the risk of violent victimization outside.

Now, what can we learn about domestic violence, besides that methodologically improvement is needed to get more valid information about this kind of violence? According to our research, most victims do not view violence at the hand of a closely-related offender as a crime. That is also the reason why most of such incidents are not reported to the police. I think this shortcoming should be addressed when developing intervention and prevention strategies.

Another reason that domestic violence incidents go unreported is that most victims, if asked about their needs and wishes, declare that they are not interested in punishing the offender. Their main interest is in finishing the violent encounters, and their second interest is getting effective protection against recurrence of violence. That is a problem of the German law. For example, we do not have things like protection orders in Germany. Following these results of our research, we are going to develop other projects and research whether similar things would be possible in Germany.

Lastly, we found that women who, as children, were victimized repeatedly by their parents or repeatedly witnessed their parents victimizing each other have a markedly increased likelihood to become victims of repeated violence in adulthood. This risk is about forty-five times higher for these women. This finding is in line with previous American research and points to the fact that prevention efforts also should address the problem of victims staying in the violent relationship. It is really a problem for social workers in Germany. It is really frustrating for workers in women's shelters to see women come into the shelter after

having been heavily beaten and return to their beating husbands again and again. That these women return to the husbands might be a result of previous childhood experiences, which are a kind of learning experience that violent behavior is a normal way to settle conflicts.

And second message is that they have no control and they are not able to change the situation or to leave the situation. They feel completely dependent on the person who is violating them. I think this childhood experience is something that should be addressed in the intervention with adult victims, and that prevention of violence against children is one way of preventing violence in total.

