

# Domestic Violence Legislation in Japan Does Not Mandate Batterers' Intervention Programs...

By Nori Yamaguchi

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At present Japan is contemplating possible amendments to its Domestic Violence Prevention Law. Consideration is being given to batterers' intervention programs. As yet, such programs are not mandated by law.

### FACING AWARENESS

Currently, there are 20 men participating in the three programs under the AWARE Behavior Modification Program. Their ages range from 20 to the 60, and their occupations vary from government employees to business men and the self-employed. As all the current participants are employed and seemingly living normal lives, perhaps this is the profile of a typical "domestic violence man."

There are some participants who are in the program because their spouses demanded that they attend the program as a condition for their return to their homes. These men share many commonalities. One factor that stands out is that they had not been able to recognize their own tendencies.

They were forced to become aware when their partners left and/or when their partners demanded divorces.

In other words, they could not "face awareness" until they were shocked by a hurtful incident, until they felt "left at the edge of a cliff."

### SPOUSAL CONTROL

Participant 'A' was shocked to be asked by his wife to help with the household chores one day. He began to do some chores, but constantly felt irritated. He felt as though he was being forced to do these chores.

As he began to complain, his wife started to talk back to him. When he was not able to win the argument through logic, he resorted to violence. One day a small incident triggered him. He not only kicked his wife, he also grabbed her by the hair and pounded her head against the refrigerator.

As for participant 'B,' he found that married life was quite different from what he expected. As his frustration mounted, he began to take his anger out on items around the house.

In his house, all remote controls are broken in some manner. He also kicked doors, flipped tables upside down, and yelled at his wife, telling her, "You are no good!" Furthermore, he sexually battered her



Nori Yamaguchi, left, and Alice LaFollette, CABIP Co-Chair, South, enjoy a tranquil scene when Alice was an invited presenter at several organizations in Japan last Fall.

by forcing sex. He blamed anything negative on the fact that his wife had a job.

Both participants 'A' and 'B' appear to be kind and logical thinkers. They work as any ordinary men. Still, they must be held accountable for their violence towards their wives.

Their actions stem from deeply rooted gender-biased thinking, such as, "What is a man if he cannot control his wife?" "If she is wrong, you can teach her a lesson by hitting her." "I am the man of the house." "A man cannot be defeated by a woman." "A woman is supposed to support a working man." "A woman should obey her man." The societal need to tolerate violence furthers such thinking and its subsequent behavior.

### BOUND BY 'MAJINETS'

As the participants attend our groups, they begin to open up and to help one another by sharing their feelings, experiences, pain and suffering. They learn to think from others' perspectives, as they listen to other men talk.

Men in our groups begin to build awareness for their violent behavior in layers. They recognize their anger, their egos, their situations and roles, and then their pain. By continuing to process, the possibility that they can change arises for the first time.

Participant 'A' now clearly understands that domestic violence is a crime, and understands that gender bias was engrained in his thinking as a child.

With such awareness, he came to recognize that his gut reactions to women now are based in the distant past. By identifying this old thinking, he can change and escape his anger's vicious cycle.

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# ...AWARE Program Seeks Amendment to Law Which Would Require Rehabilitative Services

As for participant 'B,' he became aware that his thinking has dictated that a man be the center of the family, the bread winner. He also thought that his wife should be a "thing" that he possessed. She is supposed to know exactly what he wants and to act accordingly. He now understands that she cannot mind-read and that he has to say directly what he feels, thinks, and wants.

It is imperative that all participants must learn about, and eliminate, gender-biased thinking in the program, just like participants 'A' and 'B.'

### ONE'S TRUE FEELINGS

Further on in the program, participants become aware of the fact that they are choosing violence as their behavior. With that awareness, they can choose alternative behaviors that are not violent.

None of the participants are violent because they want to be violent. When these people become violent, it is usually when their feelings and/or pride have been hurt. Many men are afraid or ashamed to show weakness or to have "weak" feelings, which are not "manly."

At the same time, many are unable to express their true feelings because they have been taught to equate "expressing one's own feelings" with "unmanly" act. Hence, they have not learned to express feelings in words. It is important for the participants to learn communication skills. Focusing on feelings and learning to express them in "I" message format is a much-needed practice.

### CHANGE THROUGH RE-EDUCATION

Through our program, participants learn that their violence is their own responsibility, that violence does not solve anything, and that violence, in fact, destroys families. Some men have had to learn that they must accept their partners' wishes to leave them. A number of men are not able to change at all, or quit the program, albeit not many. The program is not a cure-all.

### MANDATORY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

As much as support programs for victims must have the highest priority for combating domestic violence, programs for batterers are just as important. Together, these two programs can operate, just as two wheels must function together to move a vehicle. Currently, Japan's Domestic Violence Prevention Law does not include a mandate for attending batterers' intervention programs. Men who are not able to take their first steps toward awareness most likely will not come to a batterers' intervention program without a mandate to do so.

As long as batterers do not change, domestic

violence will not be eliminated. Even if the victims can escape, batterers may simply find new victims. Moreover, batterers are dangerous and threaten the local community, if left alone. With the upcoming amendment to the Domestic Violence Prevention Law, one hopes for a pro-active position in arresting batterers, harsh sentences, and a mandate for rehabilitative programs. Combining, protection orders with mandates for batterers to participate in batterers' intervention programs may be the most effective intervention.

### ENDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The cause for domestic violence lies in the roots of a society that has allowed violence to be used as a solution to problems. Today's society condones prejudice against women. There are numerous barriers for keeping women from becoming independent. Without changing such factors, domestic violence will never be eliminated.

We need all people to recognize that domestic violence can happen to anyone, and to proclaim that "Domestic violence does matter to me." Then, society can unite to declare that, "Domestic violence will not be tolerated; there is no excuse for domestic violence." Only then can the chain of violence really be severed.

Editor's Note: Ms. Yamaguchi spent considerable time in the United States, doing research on batterers' intervention programs for her book. She attended a number of ABIP and CABIP meetings and interviewed members who are quoted in the book.

She is the founder of Japan Batterers' Intervention Programs (JABIP), and will be a presenter at the upcoming CABIP Conference on March 26, 27, 28 in Long Beach. (see back page).

### SPOTLIGHT...

#### FOOTHILL FAMILY SERVICES

When he graduated, he agreed to return periodically to present his experiences to our adolescent boys' anger management group. In that capacity, he was quite effective because the boys were able to identify with his disclosures.

Larry's story is only one example of a client who was forced to respond to the sanctions, but whose life was ultimately changed by the support he found in group. In any five years of experience, there have been many such examples. Thinking about these men and the road they traveled in group, it seems on balance, to be the combination of compassionate confrontation and support that works to effect change.

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