

**Breaking the silence: dealing with domestic violence**  
**Strong families are the first agent to prevent and confront domestic violence**

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1

I work for the International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental, independent, and non-profit federation with the primary mission to support families through training. Thanks to the extensive collaboration with more than 200 members and more than 7,000 volunteers around the world, IFFD programs are currently offered in 68 countries worldwide to over 50,000 families annually, and we have been granted reclassification of the consultative status at the United Nations ECOSOC to a situation granted to only 3% of the organizations working there.

Taking into account the broad experience of our Federation in dealing with families worldwide, we see every day that family is where the vast majority of people learn the fundamental skills for life, and therefore it is the best environment to prevent violence, especially at home.

2

The levels of violent family dysfunction reported by global agencies suggest a need to address families and communities as a whole with the aim of restoring secure attachments, functional relationships, and family and community resilience. This is often attempted through family training and support programs —such as improving new-parent competence—, school-based programs, and community awareness campaigns —including those increasingly being implemented in the workplace.

Researchers are also recognizing an important connection between individual, family and community factors. Oddly, some refer to this understanding as a ‘new frontier’ in domestic violence prevention. Still, it should come as no surprise that children and families need strong connections to each other and to healthy communities in order to thrive. However, a community that tolerates violent and vengeful behavior —whether in its homes and streets or depicted routinely in its entertainment— can hardly be considered healthy. Nor can it expect its children to reject violence as an acceptable approach to resolving conflict.

3

I haven’t used the term ‘family environment’ because we find that many times it’s not in the family environment where violence arises, but in a scenario where familiar ties never really existed or were real in the past but not anymore. I prefer the term ‘domestic violence’, rather than ‘family violence’, as long as sharing a home is what better defines this kind of violence.

There is some solid rationale behind it. As the United Nations has repeatedly stated in the resolutions of its General Assembly, “children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment” (see, i. e., A/RES/67/142). In other words, the very concept of family relationship excludes violence, and the abuse of the ties that unite its members is by itself the negation of the existence of a real family.

This denomination also shows that the first way to break the silence, to prevent and find solutions is precisely “to create a conducive environment to strengthen and support all families.” (see, i. e., A/RES/64/133). It is only when real family bonds are denaturalized and replaced by other links that violence finds its place.



4

Time for domestic violence to remain hidden has passed, or at least it should have been overcome by now. Among the positive aspects we find in today's world, we can find quite a few that help to make it more visible than ever before — the great facility to communicate intimacy to the external world can be an occasion for bullying or other abuses, but it also makes easier the possibility to break the silence. As Pope Francis has stated, “the culture of abuse and cover-up is incompatible with the logic of the Gospel.” (Letter addressed to the Catholics of Chile, 31st May 2018).

5

There are a variety of theories about how the family and the state ought to relate in respect to children. One perspective has the state taking a minimal role in caring for children, intervening only in extreme cases for the protection or correction of children. At the other end of the spectrum, advocates for strong state intervention in family life seek to ensure that all children are provided with a right to caring adults who meet their needs. A third perspective on the role of the state in family life sees the main function of state intervention as maintaining the biological family wherever possible, or at least maintaining the ties between parents and children should separation be necessary.

Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the most adequate and efficient way to establish the role of the state should consider three types of domestic situations to prevent violence:

- households where family links are stable and solid: the state should respect their autonomy and avoid any interference;
- households with families in situations of vulnerability (single-parent, migrants, etc.) should be supported with family-responsive policies;
- households that have failed to establish family links or have broken them would require different types of intervention.