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SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

Social change movements related to the area of domestic abuse have largely paralleled the feminist movement throughout history. In recent modernity, the process of social change was through the primary methods of public word-of-mouth and ever-advancing forms of media (pamphlets to newspapers to radio to television to

464 SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

Internet). Social change movements consist of organized campaigns and various social involvements. They are usually collective in nature. Social movements are distinct, at least in their initial conception, from political parties and special interest groups and have as their goal changing some aspect of the status quo. Social change movements to end domestic abuse are plural in nature: to date, there has not existed one overarching movement with a clear goal, strategy, target, and scope for ending domestic abuse. As such, an important distinction exists between specific campaigns (one aspect of social change movements) and the larger social change movements from which they are derivative in their particular historical contexts.

Social change movements affiliated with ending domestic abuse have progressed from association with changing child labor/welfare laws (e.g., Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) in Europe and the United States (late nineteenth century), to affiliations with feminist movements in Europe and the United States (first and second waves), to seeking government funding and mandates (e.g., Violence Against Women Act) in Western society (in the last half century), and finally to campaigning using new media (e.g., National Coalition on Domestic Violence) all over the globe (recently). In its varying applications, social change movements pertaining to domestic abuse have been *reformational*, desirous of changing both laws and norms of violence, and *radical* and *innovative*, seeking to change basic values (often associated with patriarchy), in scope. Although the ultimate emphasis is to change abuse outcomes for individuals (both causes and effects), the nature of these movements is often a peaceful, group-focused effort. Targets of domestic abuse social change movements are also diverse, with campaigns often targeting specific audiences (e.g., primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention models). Within the range of local movements, domestic abuse social change movements can be considered “old” in the West. As such, reviving the life (in the life cycle of movements’ stages) and continuing membership of these movements is a constant struggle for domestic abuse organizations. However, with ever-evolving technology, some scholars classify specific domestic abuse campaigns and strategies as new social movements, particularly when conducted at the global level (e.g., World Health Organization funding of individual nations’ change efforts). Perhaps because of their communal and largely feminist ties, domestic abuse social change movements often lack clear leadership; no one “owns” the movement to end domestic violence. Divergent targets (macro cultures or micro individuals), goals (raise awareness, punish offenders, or serve victims), and methods (political, religious, or corporate organizing and fear, guilt, or empathy appeals) have resulted from this lack of unifying focus.

Particularly in recent years, mediated technologies have been harnessed—to varying degrees with diverse levels of effectiveness—by most social change movements related to domestic abuse. As a result, otherwise waning older movements have been able to recruit new audiences they could not reach before due to resource or message limitations. However, new media’s social change potential remains a controversial topic: Internet networking effectiveness is often overstated for specific goals such as behavior change (e.g., stopping physical violence), but broader goals

such as raised awareness of the issue may be accomplished by a social campaign that goes viral. Especially today, campaigns modeled on social marketing approaches are implemented by specific groups. The most recent, thorough works on domestic abuse social change movements are provided by Lehrner and Allen (2008, 2009), who conclude that increased attention to the issue—as a social change movement (as opposed to mere service provision)—is necessary for its continued survival.

See also: Women's Rights Movement

Further Reading

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- Women and Social Movements Today: <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/links/today.htm>

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