

THE DAILY STANDARD

WEEKEND PERSPECTIVE

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Cases and confirmed cases are different

I would like to thank your reporter, Laura Walker, for including a distinction between domestic violence cases and legal convictions in her article titled, "Over one-fourth of respondents know a victim of domestic violence" that ran on Thursday, Dec. 28. The article reads, "Of these 72 (domestic violence) cases, 27 individuals have been found guilty." Many news reports and articles omit this simple but important clarification of fact.

Protective service agencies openly offer the number of cases when asked for statistics, but require direct questioning before revealing the complete story. Most media sources quote the statistics provided as an all-inclusive fact, further propagating deceitful information. The deception lies in the misleading use of the word "case." How would you have interpreted the figures in Walker's story had it only stated, "Recent Mercer County Municipal Court records show approximately 72 cases of domestic violence before the holidays."

The only information the public learns from the number of "cases" is the workload of the reporting agency. By itself, this figure has almost no relevance to the problem of domestic violence, except to skew public opinion. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the common use of the word "case" suggests an "instance or an example of" domestic violence, rather than the meaning used here, "an incident (or accusation) under investigation."

During this past summer Mercer County Children Protective Services (CPS) participated in a public awareness campaign called "Pinwheels for Prevention." The Daily Standard ran a picture of hundreds of pinwheels stuck into the courthouse lawn and a large sign that explained how they represented the 217 "cases" of child abuse in Mercer County in 2005. Many who viewed that sign, including myself, were left with the belief that 217 children were beaten, molested, or neglected in Mercer County in 2005.

Incidents during that year had caused me to question exactly how those figures were calculated. Armed with the Freedom of Information Act and narrow questions for the CPS, I found out.

Behind the publicized figure was the hidden fact that 55 percent of the 217 "cases" were dismissed as

"unsubstantiated"; that is, there was no evidence to support the accusation. Only 25 percent or 54 "cases" were listed as "substantiated" and placed into intervention. The remaining "cases" were listed as "indicated," a term used for the enormous grey area between suspicion and fact. An "indicated" case, in reality, does not mandate intervention.

Contrary to myth, 217 children had not been abused in Mercer County in 2005. More accurately, the private lives of 118 families were subjected to government investigation, and invasion of privacy, because of a baseless, "anonymous" accusation.

If only 27 of 72 cases of domestic violence had a guilty party, what was the nature of the remaining 62 percent of the "cases?" Were they frivolous? The Federal VAWA law, (Violence Against Women Act of 2005), includes almost every aspect of domestic conflict as a legitimate act of domestic violence, if it results in the women "feeling" distressed. Under these conditions how can an informed reader accept even 27 convictions without a grain of salt?

The misuse of the word "case" is only the foothills to a mountain of exaggerated and occasionally completely false propaganda used to heighten the drama and public "awareness" surrounding domestic violence and child abuse. If we continue to accept the climate of fear nurtured by government agencies and political organizations whose power relies heavily on domestic strife and turmoil, we will all pay dearly for it in the long run. Legitimate victims of child abuse and domestic violence require our sincere support and protection, exaggerating the situation does not serve that purpose.

Perhaps it is time for the responsible citizens of this county to seriously question the antics of these agencies and organizations. Certainly, a reputable, professional agency would not feel threatened to include such relevant figures as convictions and "substantiated" cases in their reports. I would hope a true steward of the public trust would feel an obligation to present its contribution to our community as accurately and clearly as possible.

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