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Aphrodite Matsakis, Ph.D.

The 11 chapters in *Family Violence* examine the prevalence, family dynamics, and social, legal, and psychological intervention strategies for various types of family violence. The book provides a history of wife and child abuse and of family law and a current update on the most recently publicized form of family violence, elder abuse.

With distressing regularity, the contributors cite studies that show that family violence, in all its ugly forms, occurs at heartbreakingly high rates at all levels of society. Spouse abuse afflicts 50 percent of all homes; child abuse, some 1.4 to 1.9 million children per year; father-daughter incest (only one of many forms of incest), at least one in every hundred women; and elder abuse, some 500,000 to 1.5 million elderly persons per year.

Despite this epidemic of violence, the contributors contend,

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there are still mental health professionals who deny the fact that one is safer on the streets than at home. Others acknowledge the existence of domestic violence but tend to minimize the tremendous psychological damage it causes. Like certain police and court officials, they view family violence as a "family matter" rather than as a crime punishable by law, or they consider it solely a symptom of individual or family pathology rather than a widespread social problem reinforced by media glorifications of violence, by sexism, and by "blame the victim" attitudes and practices in a variety of social and legal institutions.

The contributors to this book include psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers as well as an attorney and a police officer. All have had extensive experience with or conducted research on a specific area of family violence. Their purpose is to inform their colleagues of the extent and significance of this ever-growing national problem. Because coursework in family violence is not a degree requirement for any of the mental health professions, the experts in this book plead with their colleagues to educate themselves.

Uninformed mental health professionals can easily damage the victims of family violence, the contributors contend, by not inquiring about abuse, by discounting their pain, or by overpathologizing their symptoms—that is, by seeing their conflicts primarily as the cause, rather than the result, of the abuse. Uninformed professionals will also have difficulty seeing through the passive and other manipulative stances frequently assumed by Dr. Jekyll—and—Mr. Hyde wife and child abusers and may inadvertently come to side with the aggressor rather than the victim.

The chapters are well researched and concisely written. Notable chapters are the one on sexism, with a chart of the stages of growth for the male batterer; the chapter on elder abuse, with an assessment form for such abuse; and the chapter on incest. A parent stress-level test and an extensive bibliography are also in-

cluded. What is needed, however, is a discussion of posttraumatic stress disorder and of abuse survivors.

For the mental health professional who is unfamiliar with the area of family violence, this book is a good beginning.