

American Family Violence in Foreign Countries

What is Domestic Violence?

“Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behavior that is used by a person against family or household members or dating partners to gain power or control over the other party in a relationship. This behavior may include any of the following: physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse and threats, stalking, isolation from friends and family, economic control, destruction of personal property and animal cruelty.”

-Maine Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2001)

Barriers to American Survivors Living Abroad

- No access to travel documents
- No permission to leave country
- Abuser may be high ranking in the American Embassy, local government or corporation
- Does not speak the language
- Unfamiliarity with resources and legal system
- No domestic violence laws
- Local services may not be accessible to non-citizens
- Undocumented legal status

Obstacles Facing Survivors After Returning

- May be homeless, penniless and will probably not be able to recover any personal possessions or assets.
- Protracted international custody cases
- Locating and paying for an international family law attorney
- Reverse culture shock
- Lack of support network
- Does not qualify for services such as shelter transitional housing
- Difficulty finding employment due to a gap in work history
- Credit history does not transfer from abroad

- Abuser might have contacts in US looking for the survivor and children
- Difficulty enforcing US alimony and child support orders in foreign countries.

What You Need to Know About Child Custody

- Through an international treaty, *Hague Convention on International Child Abduction*, an abuser can force a fleeing survivor to return the children to the foreign country.
- The Hague Convention has no stated exception for domestic violence.
- Abusers can also use other custody laws such as *Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act* to gain custody of the children.
- There are defenses to these actions. Survivors need to consult with an International Family Lawyer to assess their options.



International Toll-Free Crisis Line

866-USWOMEN

When calling the crisis line from abroad, first dial your regional AT&T operator

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How Many Americans Live Overseas?

According to the US State Department estimate in 2005, 6.6 million American civilians live in foreign countries. If these Americans were in one state, it would be the 13th largest state in the US (between Virginia with 7.7 million and Washington with 6.5 million).

According to the American Institute on Domestic Violence, 5.3 million women are abused each year in the United States. Presuming the overseas population of expatriates reflects this statistic, it can be estimated that each year around 113,800 expatriate women will be abused by an intimate partner.

What We Do

The Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center works with abused American women and children in foreign countries to provide domestic violence and child abuse advocacy, resources and tools so that they can navigate the complicated jurisdictional, legal & social international landscapes, to be able to live their lives free of abuse either in the foreign country or back in the United States.

The Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center offers the only international domestic violence crisis line and is accessible toll free from 175 countries.

The Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center provides a full range of services including:

- Developing long lasting working relationships with survivors to assist them from danger to self sufficiency.
- Comprehensive safety planning
- Assistance obtaining travel documents
- Danger-to-safety relocation
- Travel logistics and discounted airfare
- Advocate for safe housing
- Pro-bono attorney consultation and referrals
- Telephone counseling
- Assistance with emergency and basic needs
- All services are free and confidential

Get Help

If you or someone you know has experienced domestic violence in a foreign country, contact us:

866-USWOMEN (879-6636)

help@866uswomen.org

When calling the crisis line from abroad, first dial your regional AT&T operator.

AT&T operators by country:

<http://www.business.att.com/bt/access.jsp>

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Additional Resources

Hot Peach Pages

<http://www.hotpeachpages.net/>

A global inventory of hotlines, shelters, refuges, crisis centers and women's organizations, searchable by country.

The Hague Domestic Violence Project

<http://www.haguedv.org/>

Information to battered mothers, their advocates and attorneys, and judges hearing Hague Convention cases involving adult domestic violence.

Bureau of Consular Affairs

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html

Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas

US Embassies, Consulates and Diplomatic Missions

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas

<http://www.fawco.org/>

References

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(2001). American Institute on Domestic Violence. Retrieved April 16, 2009 from

<http://www.aidv-usa.com/statistics.htm>

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A Federal Tax Exempt 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization

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