

An Historical Perspective on Legal and Cultural Attitudes to Domestic Abuse – Some Helpful Facts

This is available as a power point presentation which can be downloaded from www.womensaid.org.uk/historicalperspective

Domestic Violence and Abuse

Historical Perspective – 1

- It is **legal** (and therefore perfectly acceptable) for a man to **beat** his wife,

providing that

- the **stick** he uses is no thicker than his thumb.

1857 – the Rule of Thumb (150 years ago)

Historical Perspective – 2

- Upon marriage, a husband becomes **legally responsible** for the actions of both his wife and children,

therefore he can

- **physically and verbally chastise** them in order to control their behaviour.

1860 – the Law of Coveture (150 years ago)

Historical Perspective – 3

- **Wife beating** is prohibited between the hours of 10 pm and 7 am,

because

- the **noise** keeps the neighbours awake.

1895 – Curfew on wife beating (110 years ago)
(City of London Byelaw)

From the Manchester Evening News

- A woman giving evidence against her husband at Salford yesterday, on a charge of assault, was admonished by the Stipendiary.
- Mr Makinson said: "This is the way with you women. You chatter, chatter, chatter until you irritate. You get the man mad, then you get struck and come here. Try to keep your mouth shut and you will get on better."

January 6, 1905 – 100 years ago

Advice from a woman's magazine

- Before your husband comes home: brush your hair, put a ribbon in, tidy the home, have his tea ready and put on some lipstick, a smile and a clean pinny [*pinafore*].
- Don't bother him with your day. He has had a busy day and his day is more important than yours.
- Don't ask questions if he is late or stays out all night.

1960's Good Housekeeping – 40 years ago

Historical Perspective – 4

- "Domestic violence and stray dogs rubbish work for police officers."

1984 – Sir Kenneth Newman Metropolitan Police Commissioner (**24 years ago**)

Historical Perspective – 5

In England and Wales

- Marriage implies consent for sexual intercourse;
- It is deemed as a husband's legal right,

Therefore

- No criminal offence is committed if a husband 'rapes' his wife.

Marital rape was only made a criminal act in 1991 (17years ago)

Marital rape

- Up until then it was considered impossible for a man to rape or sexually assault his wife. To quote:
- "A husband cannot rape his wife unless the parties are separated or the court has by Injunction forbidden him to interfere with his wife or he has given an undertaking in court not to interfere with her."

(The law made simple, The Chaucer Press, 1981)