

# SAFV Voices

Sitkans Against Family Violence

June 2011

## Military Rape: Rampant, Ignored

A lawsuit against Robert Gates and Donald Rumsfeld  
and new legislation try to stop an epidemic.

By Nan Levinson  
May 18, 2011

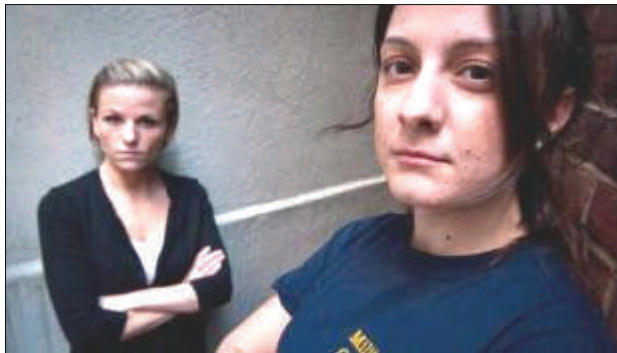
When Panayiota Bertzikis tried to tell her commanding officers that she had been raped in May 2006 by a shipmate four months into her tour at the Burlington, Vt., Coast Guard Station, they discouraged her from talking to an Equal Opportunity officer, barred her from seeing a civilian therapist, ignored a written confession from her attacker and browbeat her into silence.

But thanks to victims-turned-activists like Bertzikis who are pulling military sexual trauma (MST) out from the shadows, it's become harder for the U.S. military to ignore the problem. In February, Bertzikis, along with 14 other women and two men, filed a lawsuit (*Cioca et al. v. Rumsfeld and Gates*) charging Defense Secretary Robert Gates and his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld, with mishandling their sexual assault cases.

MST is an epidemic. Nearly a quarter of women serving in combat areas say they have been sexually assaulted by fellow soldiers. But everyone agrees that reliable statistics don't exist. The Pentagon, which recorded 3,158 cases of sexual assault in 2010, estimates that only about 14 percent of all incidents are reported.

Back in 2006, when Bertzikis went online after her rape to look for help, she found almost no information. But when she blogged about her experi-

ence, stories similar to hers poured in. In response, Bertzikis—who left the Coast Guard in 2007 and is now 29—set up the Military Rape Crisis Center in Cambridge, Mass. She estimates the organization has provided 6,200 people with counseling, legal advocacy and case management—along with the assurance that they are not alone.



Veterans Kori Cioca, 25, of Wilmington, Ohio, left, and Panayiota Bertzikis, 29, of Somerville, Mass., both assaulted and raped while serving in the U.S. Coast Guard, meet at their attorney's office in Washington, Sunday, Feb. 13, 2011. (Photo via: AP / Cliff Owen)

Susan Burke, the attorney in Washington, D.C., who initiated the lawsuit, says, "The military is woefully mishandling these cases all the time." Intending to file what she calls "a reform lawsuit," she sought plaintiffs through advocacy groups, including the Crisis Center.

Their allegations are not easy reading. The plaintiffs report being spat on, grabbed at, masturbated over, stripped, drugged,

stalked, beaten and raped. One rapist took photos; another videotaped the event. (That tape was later used as evidence against the victim because, she was told, it showed that she "did not struggle enough.") When victims' reported the abuse, their commanders ignored them, insisted the sex was consensual or a result of drinking, and ordered them not to pursue action because it would ruin their attacker's career. In a world where rank is everything, those raped were generally low-level, while their rapists were often their superiors. The plaintiffs report being forced to continue working under their attackers' supervision or to live nearby.

By the Pentagon's reckoning, fewer than 21

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## SAFV Board Secretary Maite Lorente Worked With Women in Latin America

My name is Maite Lorente, and I am a proud SAFV Board Member. Silence is the ultimate reason why I am part of this organization, more precisely, the necessity of breaking silence and secrecy when it comes to violence. Silence operates as a survival strategy, and yet it is a powerful mechanism of control enforced by fear.

I learned this while working with women organizations in different countries of Latin America. Women in the rural El Salvador taught me about women's bodies, or more exactly, about how the lack of control of one's body can determine a life forever. I learned this when I met a forty-year old woman who was unable to get out of bed after having several pregnancies due to rape and abuse. Unable to stand up, she couldn't find food for her children, and the girls in the family had to go to work at a coffee plantation to feed the family. This was a humble lesson number two: if you were born in a female body in the 'wrong' place and time, you don't have the right of an education. My eyes opened just a bit in El Salvador. I was young and naïve, and although the horror of those women's lives impacted me, I didn't have the knowledge to put those testimonies into perspective.

Then I moved to Guatemala where during four years I learned all I could from the beautiful, generous, welcoming Maya people. I worked in development projects, first in Antigua and later in Quetzaltenango. I had the beautiful opportunity to work with community radio stations where Maya people including women broadcast programs in their own language. Here I learned about silence. In order to understand Guatemala's reality, working with men and women who had gone through massacres and brutality for many years, I started understanding how the mechanisms of violence work. Breaking the silence, telling the stories of horror of the war in Guatemala was a ritual that took years to happen. Fear was the reason why the victims of war didn't testify about their experiences. When they did, testifying became a ritual of both healing and a condemnation of injustice, both privately and publicly.

It is similar to a woman who decides to step



Maite (right) interviewing one of her friends in Bolivia who understood prevention very well. For them prevention was to learn how to read and write and talk about women's bodies, and above all, women's desires. Basically, the desire to live without scars.

forward and give testimony of how violence shaped her life. In order to testify, a woman needs the right place and the right persons to listen. This is what SAFV is for me: a place safe enough for a human being born in a woman's body to speak up, offer testimony, heal, and walk forward.

After my four years in Guatemala I wanted to keep working with women and children. I returned to Spain and started a master program in Gender and Development. I never imagined I would live in Sitka, Alaska. When I moved here, the logical thing to do was to get involved in an organization that shares the same values: that all human beings are worthy, and that women deserve a life free of violence and silence.

The secrecy of violence is a terrible societal wound that will never end without a profound social change; a social change that requires the involvement of men. I strongly believe that this shift of values needs a strong prevention strategy. Prevention means imagining a horror before the horror even happens and doing everything humanly possible to avoid this. Prevention also means ensuring that everybody gets the same chance in life.

## Prevention that Works: Girls on the Run



On May 14<sup>th</sup>, Girls on the Run celebrated the conclusion of its spring season with a 5K run through Totem Park. Our 27 girls were joined by their eleven coaches and 31 volunteer running buddies on a gorgeous day in Sitka.

All of the participants completed the run in under an hour and with a smile on their faces as they crossed the finish line to receive their medals and certificates. We would like to thank all of our volunteers and supporters for their continued sharing of positive energy, time and encouragement with the girls.

**Girls on the Run is so much fun!**



On a glorious day in May, the 12-week long running and prevention program culminated in a 5K run along Sitka's waterfront and through National Historical Park.

## Pizza, Ice Cream, and Mozart: Chamber Music at SAFV



Thanks to a grant by the Nisha A. Kirk Fund, Sitka Summer Music Festival's operations manager Melissa Marconi-Wentzel introduces world-class artists to the shelter. Every Friday in June for the duration of the festival, Melissa brings pizza and ice cream, and while residents and staff have lunch, a female musician performs on her instrument.

In the picture at the left, Lorna McGhee just finished a piece on her flute, one she played in public for the first time. Thank you, Melissa, Lorna, and the Sitka Summer Music Festival, for the acoustical delights for all at SAFV to enjoy.



*(Continued from page 1)*

percent of reported cases make it to court martial and only a little over half of those result in convictions. In the ultimate insult, as a result of their trauma, many MST victims are deemed unfit to serve and were kicked out of the military. "Every case I get," says Bertzikis, "they blame the victim, the perpetrator never gets punished and the survivor is the one who ends up losing her career."

Because the military investigates itself, there is little incentive to deal with a problem that makes everyone look bad. In civilian life, of course, most rapes also go unreported and most assailants don't spend time in prison. But because enlistees cannot just walk away, the aftermath of an unpunished assault in the military can often be more traumatic for victims. Commanders have control over an enlistee's career, living situation, safety, medical care and community standing. When a rape survivor is forced to confront her attacker daily, Bertzikis says, "The only options out are going AWOL or suicide."

It may not be possible for civilians to change military culture, but they can create oversight and accountability. In April, a pair of legislators reintroduced a bill to do just that. The Defense STRONG Act, co-sponsored by Reps. Niki Tsongas (D-Mass.) and Mike Turner (R-Ohio), would guaran-

tee access to a military lawyer, allow victims to transfer from where the assault happened, ensure confidentiality of communication with advocates and counselors, give teeth to the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office and institute effective rape prevention training, which now seems to focus on telling service women how to avoid getting raped. The Holley Lynn James Act, written by Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) with the help of SWAN, would go further by creating a system of independent oversight; MST cases would go to military court automatically.

The bills' prospects remain uncertain, but the lawsuit, along with some horrific high-profile cases, has focused attention on pervasive sexual trauma in the U.S. military. "There's a groundswell," says Anu Bhagwati, executive director of the advocacy group Service Women's Action Network and a former Marine captain. "The epidemic is widely known, so Congress can't afford to ignore it any longer."

*Nan Levinson, a Boston-based journalist, is author of **Outspoken: Free Speech Stories**. [www.moreoutspoken.blogspot.com](http://www.moreoutspoken.blogspot.com).*

*Source: [http://inthesetimes.com/article/7317/military\\_rape\\_rampant\\_ignored](http://inthesetimes.com/article/7317/military_rape_rampant_ignored)*

## Child Sexual Abuse PREVENTION

### *Editor's note:*

*Child sexual abuse in Alaska is almost six times the national average. As citizens and potential bystanders, we have the opportunity to change this sad statistic if we know and see the signs that can lead to the abuse. The following article is from an information packet we received on June 1, 2011, from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. We think you need to know the following facts:*

### **What is child sexual abuse?**

- A person sexually abuses a child when he or she exposes the child to sexual acts of behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve:
  - Sex acts that involve penetration
  - Touching the child's breasts or genitals
  - Making a child touch the perpetrator's breasts or genitals
  - Voyeurism (that is, when a perpetrator looks at a child's naked body)
  - Exhibitionism (that is, when a perpetrator shows a child his or her naked body)

In addition, other forms of child sexual abuse may include the following:

- Showing a child pornography or using a child in the production of pornography
- Child sexual exploitation, such as trafficking or child prostitution
- Internet-based child sexual abuse, such as creating, depicting, and/or distributing sexual images of children online; or stalking, grooming, and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviors with children online.

Children who have been sexually abused may also experience verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Perpetrators may use force or, more commonly, manipulate (e.g., threatening to harm a child's family or pets, telling the child that no one will believe him or her) to abuse a child and keep him or her from telling others. Child sexual abuse is a crime and an abuse of trust, power, and authority that may contribute to serious short- and long-term problems for the child.

### **Who are the victims of child sexual abuse?**

**Gender:** Both boys and girls are vulnerable to child sexual abuse. Research has shown that girls are abused three times more often than boys, whereas boys are more likely to die or be seriously injured by their abuse.

**Age:** Children of all ages, from birth to age 17, may be sexually abused. In a recent survey, adolescents ages 14 to 17 were by far the most likely to be sexually victimized; nearly one in six adolescents (16.3 percent) was sexually victimized in the past year, and more than one in four (27.3 percent) had been sexually victimized during their lifetimes.

### **Who are the perpetrators of child sexual abuse?**

**Gender:** Based on law enforcement reports, 96 percent of people who sexually abuses a child were male.

**Age:** Most perpetrators are adults. Law enforcement reports showed, 76.8 percent of those who perpetrated sexual assaults were adults; 23.2 percent were juvenile people who sexually abuse children with 19.5 percent of perpetrators between the age of 12-17.

### **How common is child sexual abuse?**

- In a year, about one in 12 children are sexually abused.
- Overall, 6.1 percent of all children surveyed had been sexually victimized in the past
- About one in three girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused before the age of 17.

### **What are the warning signs that a child may be sexually abused?**

- Evidence shows that child sexual abuse is not always obvious and many children do not report that they have been abused. Many children are embarrassed or feel guilty. Some fear the conse-

quences of a disclosure and the ramifications it will have on the family and the people who sexually abuse children. Children often love and trust the people who sexually abuse them, creating further barriers and complications in coming forward. They may feel confused because of the ways in which their bodies may have reacted to the abuse. Victims may also have a fear that there is something wrong with them or that they caused the abuse.

A child may show any or none of the following warning signs if he or she is being abused:

- Bodily signs (e.g., bed-wetting, stomach-aches, headaches, sore genitals).
- Emotional signs (e.g., fear, sadness, mood changes, acting out, refusing to be left alone with certain people).
- Sexual signs (e.g., inappropriate sexual behavior with objects or other children).
- Verbal signs (e.g., voicing knowledge about sexuality that is not age- or developmentally appropriate).

These indicators may be cause for further attention and concern of the part of parents, caregivers, teachers, and others involved in children's lives.

### **Risk factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse**

Over the past 20 years, researchers have identified six categories of risk factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse. These categories include:

1. Family risk factors (history of abuse, poor family functioning including more harsh discipline, and poor family attachment/bonding)
2. Externalizing behaviors (aggression/violence, anger/hostility, substance abuse, non-violent criminality, paranoia/mistrust)
3. Internalizing behaviors (history of mental illness, anxiety and low self-esteem)
4. Social deficits (low social skills, loneliness, difficulties with intimate relationships)

5. Sexual problems (deviant sexual interest)
6. Cognitions/attitudes tolerant of adult child sex and minimizing the perpetrator's culpability

People who sexually abuse children demonstrated substantial differences from non-offenders in all six categories.

### **How can I reduce the risk of children being abused?**

#### **Strategies for parents and concerned community members**

- Develop positive, open communication with children: talk to them about their day, friends, feelings, concerns, etc. When they talk to you, listen and be supportive.
- Model and teach about healthy relationships. Help children to create and express boundaries about being touched.
- Teach children about healthy sexual development.
- Teach children that secrets about touching and being touched are not safe secrets to keep.
- Help children to identify adults they trust whom they can confide in.
- Monitor children's internet use. Talk to them about the dangers of internet predators.
- If a child or adolescent exhibits inappropriate sexual behavior, talk with a professional to assess the need for help.
- Support child abuse prevention programs in schools and other community settings.
- Educate yourself about child sexual abuse. Share what you learn with other adults.
- If you suspect a child is being abused, contact the police or your local child protective services agency (*for Sitka, Angoon, and Kake: Call OCS Regional Intake Service at 1-888-622-1650*)

*For more resources and references, please go [www.nsvrc.org/publications/child-sexual-abuse-prevention-information-packet](http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/child-sexual-abuse-prevention-information-packet)*

## Survey Finds Domestic Violence Rises Nationwide For Third Year While Economy Struggles

### Government Budget Cuts Take Toll On Survivors and Shelters

Domestic violence shelters throughout the United States report the economy continues to significantly affect women – with domestic violence increasing for the third straight year and government cutbacks decreasing shelters’ ability to help survivors. In addition to domestic violence incidents growing and funding sources diminishing, the abuse is reportedly more severe, victims are struggling to find jobs and shelters expect the situation will only get worse in light of the economy – according to the third [“Mary Kay Truth About Abuse” national survey](#).

More than 670 domestic violence shelters across the country were surveyed in March 2011. Shelters report the economy’s decline since 2008 has increased demand for their services, and they also note their shelters’ ability to raise funds and provide services will be hampered over the next 12 months. [Detailed findings](#) from the 2011 “Mary Kay Truth About Abuse” survey reveal alarming trends in light of the economy’s decline since 2008, including:

- 80 percent of domestic violence shelters nationwide (more than three out of four) report an increase in women seeking assistance from abuse.
- 73 percent of shelters attribute this rise in abuse to financial issues.
- 48 percent of shelters link this increase in domestic violence to job loss.
- 89 percent of domestic violence shelters expect

their overall situation during the next 12 months will be worse than now, or the same as now, due to the economy.

- 76 percent of domestic violence shelters (three out of four) indicate their funding has decreased the most from governmental organizations.
- 65 percent of women in shelters can’t find employment due to the economy.
- 56 percent of shelters note the abuse is more violent now than before the economic downturn.
- 77 percent of shelters (more than three-fourths) indicate their clients stayed longer in their relationships due to the state of the economy.

Sue Else, president of the National Network to End Domestic Violence, said: “The ‘Mary Kay Truth About Abuse’ survey confirms for the third year in a row that the economy is affecting cases of domestic violence and the situation is becoming worse nationwide. While the economy does not create domestic violence, a downturn can exacerbate the frequency and severity of abuse. The demand for domestic violence services continues to increase significantly, yet at the same time, funding sources are down. We applaud companies like Mary Kay for stepping up and strongly urge others to do their part to help end domestic violence.”

*Source: CAEPV e-update April 29, 2011  
(Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence)*



## SAFV's New Mission Statement

SAFV's board of directors agreed on a new mission statement for our organization:

The mission of SAFV is to promote nonviolent, healthy, respectful relationships, and to reduce risk factors and occurrences of interpersonal violence. SAFV recognizes that social change is necessary to end multi-generational cycles of interpersonal violence, and is committed to providing safety and advocacy services, and to empower survivors of current interpersonal violence.

### SAFV Board

Brian McNitt, chair

David Levesque, treasurer

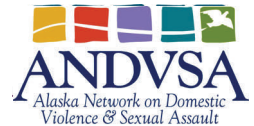
Cindy Westergaard, board member

Maite Lorente, secretary

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United Way Member Agency

Member of the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



Sitkans Against Family Violence  
P.O. Box 6136  
Sitka, AK 99836  
Phone: 907-747-3370  
Crisis Line: 1-800-478-6511

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