

LEGAL ADVOCACY  
FOR  
CHILD  
VICTIMS OF  
DOMESTIC & SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE



Edited By:  
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Kathy Skaggs is the staff attorney for TCADSV and has worked in the field of domestic and sexual violence for more than twenty years. Receiving her law degree from New York University in 1981, she practiced law with the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee in Gallatin for eight years and is a co-founder of the Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and HomeSafe. She is the editor of the *Tennessee Domestic Abuse Benchbook*, author of *Legal Advocacy for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence*, and a frequent trainer on domestic and sexual violence and legal advocacy.

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# Legal Advocacy for Child Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence

## Introduction

Every two minutes a child is sexually abused in the United States. Diana Russell, David Finkelhor, and Vincent DeFrancis all conclude in their separate research that at least one in four females will be sexually abused by age eighteen (Urguiz and Keating, 1990). Suzanne Sgroi in her research about child sexual abuse determined that one in six to ten males would be sexually abused by age eighteen (Sgroi, 1978). Research on male victimization reveals that about 70 percent of male victims are abused by men and 83 percent of sexually abused males are under the age of twelve (Urguiza and Keating, 1990). All of these researchers agree that the large majority of child sexual abuse incidents go unreported.

More than 3.3 million children annually witness their mother being abused (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, Children of Battered Women). As many as 70% of children living in homes where their mother is being abused are also victims of physical abuse and 30% report being victims of sexual assault as well (Guide for Health Professionals, New Jersey Women's Division). Being abused or neglected as a child increases the risk of juvenile crime by 58%, adult crime by 38% and for a violent crime by 38% (National Institute of Justice).

While accurate data on the number of domestic and sexual violence incidents, including child abuse and child sexual abuse, in Tennessee is not currently available, TCADSV's network of 71 domestic violence shelters, programs, and rape crisis centers provide services to more than 65,000 victims annually. Women accessing these services are often low income and have few resources. A significant number of these women also have children who are being impacted by the violence.

Both attorney and non-attorney advocates for women and children need comprehensive information, training, and technical assistance to develop and maintain effective legal advocacy services. This manual, *Legal Advocacy for Child Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence*, is our attempt to begin to provide this information. It is our hope that it will provide resources to advocates and stimulate our creative thinking as we strive to bring about violence-free lives for children in our state and the world.

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