

# For the Abused, an Electronic Lifeline

## Brooklyn Program Gives Battered Women Necklace Alarms

By DENNIS HEVESI

Fifteen times in five years the man who says he loves her has attacked. Her nose has been broken. Her ribs have been broken. Her eyes have been blackened.

"Eight months pregnant with black eyes," she said recently, sitting in a room at the Brooklyn District Attorney's office. "In January, I had a knife at my throat while I was breast-feeding my baby."

As she spoke, the 33-year-old woman clutched a pendant hanging from a chain around her neck. "This alarm — I'm not just saying this — could save somebody's life," she said. "I anticipate having to use it, but I haven't had to yet.

"Try reaching for the phone when you have an animal coming at you."

The electronic alarm is part of a collaboration between the office of the Brooklyn District Attorney, Charles J. Hynes, the ADT Security Systems Corporation and more than a dozen other companies to provide an extra layer of security for some battered women in Brooklyn.

"When the victim presses the button, it sends an electronic signal to ADT," said Julie Martinez, chief of the District Attorney's domestic violence bureau. "They immediately notify 911, which puts it over the air as an 'Aware' call — that's the name of the program — and it gets a higher code, resulting in a more rapid response."

Since March, the security company has provided the pendants free to 20 women in Brooklyn. Since then, Brooklyn Union Gas and 14 other companies have put up \$32,000 to cover the costs of equipping 50 more women — \$577 for each alarm and \$18 a month to monitor each device.

Seventy women, of course, is a tiny fraction of the victims. Last year, Mr. Hynes's office prosecuted 5,100 cases of domestic violence. Through June of this year, it has prosecuted 4,163. But Ms. Rodriguez said many women decline to prosecute and only seek an order of protection.

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Steve Hart for The New York Times

A Brooklyn woman with an emergency pendant, provided through the Brooklyn District Attorney and ADT Security Systems.

But the mere existence of the program, officials say, is a deterrent. "What we hope to do by publicizing the availability of these systems," Mr. Hynes said, "is to make it like a Potemkin village; the batterers will not know if their victim is equipped." Some judges are holding up the device in front of accused batterers and warning them to stay away.

That deterrent factor, said Robert B. Catell, who as president of Brooklyn Union was chairman of the fund-raising effort, "is worth far more than the 50 devices we provided."

To be eligible, Ms. Martinez said, a woman must have been granted an order of protection, be willing to prosecute and appear to prosecutors to be in imminent danger. Officials do not take applications for the alarm; rather, the domestic violence bureau assesses each case to determine which women have the greatest need for the alarms.

Last year, there were 650 Brooklyn cases in which orders of protection were violated — officially cited as second-degree contempt of court, a misdemeanor. This year, through May 31, there were 480 violations. Under a new law, lobbied for by Mr. Hynes, a suspect can now be charged with first-degree criminal contempt, a felony, if within the last five years he has violated a previous order of protection or if he injures the victim while violating the current order.

The District Attorney brings his own painful past to the campaign. "I remember as little kid, maybe 8 or 9," Mr. Hynes said, "together with my grandfather and my mother, every night, as a matter of rote, we would barricade the three entrances to our house in Marine Park to prevent my father from getting in."

It was on a campaign trip while running for state attorney general that Mr. Hynes first heard of the program from the Schenectady District Attorney, Robert M. Carney. ADT has sponsored the program in 30 cities in this country and Canada.

Response time in a crowded place like Brooklyn is likely to be longer. And while the woman who has been attacked 15 times expects, someday, to push the button, just having the pendant has brought her "a little peace of mind," she said.

The woman recounted how, after several attacks, she had moved out of New York. "He followed me," she said. "Same thing. He pulled the phone off the wall."

There was no safety in running. She moved back to Brooklyn. "In April," she said, "he broke into my mother's house and cornered me, said he was going to kill me: 'You'll never see the light of day.'"

"I was losing chunks and chunks of hair. What if he rings the bell again? What if he breaks down the door? What if I see him outside? It all boiled down to stress.

"This really is 60 percent of my out," the woman said of the pendant. "It takes the edge off."