

Police Officer or Social Worker?

Jack and Ann Smith are a married couple with three children ranging in age from five months to six years. Jack is unemployed and is 60 percent disabled from a wound he received in Vietnam. Ann has to provide primary care for the children and also has a part-time job at a nearby grocery store. Jack and Ann live in a housing project where the rent is based on the government welfare checks they receive.

It is near the end of the month and the food stamps have almost been depleted. Jack spent what little money they had left on beer for himself and his friends. Over the years, Jack has continued to feel bitter about his disability and apparently tries to drown his problems with alcohol.

Jack and Ann had an argument earlier in the day over the amount of money Jack spends on beer and wine. Ann was also becoming increasingly upset over Jack frequenting bars and not trying to help with household responsibilities and chores. Ann even accused Jack of feeling sorry for himself and of being a failure in general. Jack responded by slapping Ann several times and leaving the house in a fit of temper.

While Jack was gone, the two eldest children began fighting with each other, which resulted in the youngest child crying. Although Ann had carefully cleaned the apartment the day before, the children had again made a mess of the house. Her patience wearing thin, Ann rocked the youngest child in a rocking chair in an effort to stop his crying. After substantial threats from their mother, the two oldest children started playing in the kitchen and eventually broke several dishes that were on the table. That was the last straw! Ann began whipping the oldest child for breaking the dishes. Full of anger and

frustration, she whipped the child so hard that he fainted and was apparently unconscious.

Jack came back to the apartment a short time later, intoxicated and still upset over the argument in which he and Ann had engaged earlier. He found the younger children crying, the oldest child badly beaten, and Ann sitting in a kitchen chair sobbing. In a fit of rage, Jack began beating Ann.

The next-door-neighbor, aware of what was happening, called the police and explained the situation.

You are a patrol officer assigned to the call. Your partner is a female officer with little police experience. Not knowing for sure what the situation is, you do not call for a backup car. In your opinion, at this point, it is a routine family disturbance call.

As you stand outside the Smiths' apartment door, you hear children sobbing. No one answers the door or speaks to you when you knock. You think to yourself, "These people need a social worker, not a police officer." Your partner looks at you, uncertain and waiting for instructions. You take a deep breath and try to decide what the best course of action will be.

Based on what you have read, answer the following questions:

1. What can you and your partner legally do?
2. What agencies other than the police could help in this situation?
3. Should the police become involved in these types of situations?