

Lynn Kaiser Conrad

Director of Operations and Development

Domestic Abuse Council, Inc. of Volusia County

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Community Voices

When I think of the Center for Disease Control, I think of bird flu, mad cow disease and global epidemics. I also think of chronic health issues that afflict individuals in our communities and around the world. I do not think of violence.

However, in 1979, the US Surgeon General declared violent behavior as a key public health priority. Then, in 2007 a study published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimated that the cost of violence in the United States exceeded \$70 billion each year. The financial impact alone clearly affects our society, our community, and our relationships. Imagine investing these dollars in any other health issue. Included in that figure are costs associated with increased health care, employment and scholastic absenteeism. Unfortunately, there are health side effects from societal violence, which include increased substance abuse with alcohol and drugs by the victim, the perpetrator and perhaps even the witness.

Is this really a health problem, you may ask? Let's look at the numbers, the empirical data. In the last 11 months, the Domestic Abuse Council Inc. of Volusia County, which has the only emergency domestic violence shelter in Volusia County, had 5734 bed nights (those beds occupied by individuals). During that same time 296 different individuals sought shelter. This number does not reflect people who came to the shelter for multiple respite visits during the same year. Last year alone in the state of Florida more than 11,000 women and children found refuge in emergency shelters. Annually in the USA, nearly 5 million women and 3 million men

are assaulted because of domestic violence. In 2007, domestic violence claimed 2,340 deaths in the US.

October is both National Domestic Violence Awareness month as well as National Bullying Prevention Month. Not surprisingly there is a direct correlation between the two behaviors.

Domestic violence may also be referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and typically happens in the privacy of one's own home. It is time for this public health issue to come out of the bedroom closet, so to speak. Domestic violence is defined as actual or threatened physical, sexual, psychological, financial or emotional abuse by a current or former spouse, including common law, dating partner, or boyfriend or girl friend and can include children, parents, and siblings. Partners can be of the opposite gender or the same gender.

How can we impact this health epidemic? Actually it is an easy pill to swallow. Prevention is paramount and communication is the key. While the Domestic Abuse Council, Inc. of Volusia County provides training and seminars in the area, they simply do not have the resources to disseminate the message to everyone. We all must find our voices and stand up to the bullies, the teen dating violence and the domestic abuse. If you work in education, media, business, justice system, health and medical, and behavioral/social sciences, you can make a difference. Together, we must find our voice, to speak up, speak out, speak now and stop the violence through prevention and intervention.

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