



October 16, 2009

The Impact of Domestic Violence in Indiana

By: Dr. T. Neil Moore

The National Coalition against Domestic Violence identifies domestic violence (NCADV) as the willful intimidation, physical assault, sexual assault or other abusive behavior by an intimate partner or family member against another. While variables such as stress, mental illness and substance abuse may exasperate domestic violence – they are not the cause. In fact, the decision to batter is often a matter of control and a calculated choice. Domestic violence results in physical injury, psychological trauma and sometimes death. The acts of abuse cross generations and last a lifetime.

As we pause this year to recognize October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, I remain encouraged by the progress that Indiana has made in raising awareness and attention of this issue, while providing assistance to the affected victims. As the domestic violence epidemic continues to decimate the lives of so many throughout our nation, as concerned and connected citizens we are painfully reminded that it is a problem that has not gone away and continues to impact the lives of citizens every day.

Many Hoosiers continue to suffer first-hand, the devastating and far-reaching impacts of this incessant cycle that only courage can break. The statistics bear this out. According to the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV), from July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009, 51 people died as a result of domestic violence. The breakdown is as follows:

- 28 females died by acts of violence;
- 14 males, 1 of which was a child died by intimate partner violence, other family member or by the former husband/boyfriend of a female victim of domestic violence;
- 1 female committed suicide after killing her husband; and
- 8 males committed suicide after killing or attempting to kill a wife/girlfriend.

While domestic violence-related deaths are down 27 percent in comparison to the same time last year that reported 65 deaths, the statistics are nevertheless disheartening. Even more disturbing, according to a 2009 Mary Kay Inc. survey, 74 percent of the domestic violence shelters in the Midwest have reported an increase in the number of women seeking services since September 2008. The increase can be attributed to the downturn in the economy, stress, loss of employment and loss of residency.



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Information derived from the IU Protective Order Project reported that nationally 50 percent of homeless women and children have experienced domestic violence. Locally, a Marion County count of homeless individuals in 2008, it was estimated that at least 22 percent reported to be victims of domestic violence.

The reported figures reflect but a fraction of the real picture. Far too often, many victims of domestic violence do not report the crime to police nor do they reveal their physical injuries to their personal physicians. Their reluctance to do so often stems from fear of retaliation, stigmatism, or shame. According to the NCADV approximately one fourth of all physical assaults are reported to police.

The effects of domestic violence can touch any person, regardless of race, age, gender, or social economic status; domestic violence defies the boundaries of our daily lives. The cycle of violence continues to be grossly under reported as a crime and as the demographics of our nation's population changes.

In order to reverse this trend of silence, we must remain vigilant in our efforts across the state to educate the public by raising the profile of domestic abuse and holding perpetrators accountable. We cannot afford to ignore or avoid this type of violence, as dismissing the issue only brings about apathy. Domestic violence affects all sectors of our society, but education, awareness and diligence are what can bring about change.

This past April, Indiana was awarded funds as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Indiana Criminal Justice Institute's (ICJI) Victim Services division received more than \$3 million from the Office of Violent Crimes and the Office on Violence against Women to fund programs that will support projects for victim advocates local law enforcement, prosecutor's offices, shelters, rape crisis centers and programs that provide ancillary services. These additional funds have allowed programs to promote growth within their agencies, expand services and to create new initiatives to best support the victims in their communities.

There remains extensive advocacy and changes to be in place for victims to reach a sense of safety and security. As citizens we can improve the efforts of service providers by working together with our private and public sectors to bring into the forefront that domestic violence affects us all. By working together we can be the voice for victims and offer help to heal and create a positive environment for families, communities, and our state.

Ultimately, domestic violence is a varied and complex issue. We should continue to support the criminal justice system to deter this crime in order to be the catalyst for change. The acts of domestic violence belong to us all. It is not simply a legal problem, a health issue or a law enforcement dilemma. If we are to achieve real progress we must work together on local, state and the national levels to make effective changes.

101 West Washington Street, Suite 1170E; Indianapolis, IN. 46204

317.232.1233 (voice)

317.232.4979 (fax)

www.in.gov/cji



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Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) evolved from the "Day of Unity" in October 1981 conceived by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The intent was to connect advocates across the nation who were working to end violence against women and their children. The Day of Unity soon became an entire week devoted to a range of activities conducted at the local, state, and national levels.

In October 1987, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was observed. That same year marks the initiation of the first national domestic violence toll-free hotline. In 1989 the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 101-112 designating October of that year as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Such legislation has passed every year since with NCADV providing key leadership in this effort. Each year, the Day of Unity is celebrated the first Monday of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Sincerely,

T. Neil Moore, Ed.D.
Executive Director