

Raising Awareness of Domestic Violence

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Sen. Jeff Smith writes about our responsibility to show our support and share resources for survivors, while working to find long-term solutions to address this issue.

MADISON - A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet virtually with two community leaders representing domestic violence awareness organizations in Wisconsin. Every October, we recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month to bring attention to this issue and better understand the impact domestic violence has in our communities.

After having this conversation, one of the key takeaways I took from it was that we must continue raising community awareness about domestic violence even past the nationally-recognized Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Domestic violence can happen every day. In fact, [domestic violence affects more than 12 million people every year.](#)

Although October has passed, we're responsible to continue the conversation and raise awareness throughout the year. In doing so, we're working to support survivors and find long-term solutions to address this problem.

Domestic violence isn't limited to a certain age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or socioeconomic status. We know anyone can be affected by domestic violence; however, a large majority of victims are women, and offenders are often male. It's also important to remember it occurs in higher rates among marginalized communities, especially among American Indians and Alaska Natives than other groups.

Importantly, domestic violence doesn't only appear within marriage; it can appear in all types or stages of a relationship. When discussing domestic violence, many use the term "Intimate Partner Violence" interchangeably to help others better understand the many different facets or signs of domestic violence.

Not all domestic violence leaves a visible mark. Domestic violence can come in the form of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, cultural, spiritual, or digital abuse. This type of behavior is intended to maintain control or power in the relationship.



For decades, the cries of victims went unnoticed or ignored. Victims were, and are often still, wrongly blamed for the abusive situation. Blaming victims has resulted in the silence of victims. It was and sometimes still is considered a private matter that shouldn't be interfered with. Despite continued awareness of this issue, domestic violence is still very prevalent within our local communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of our lives, but it has affected victims of domestic violence even more and in such a complicated way. When schools closed and we began to isolate in our homes, it meant victims were likely trapped with their abuser for longer periods of time with no relief. The aggressor may have even become more agitated under the pressures the pandemic has wrought, such as financial stress or fewer opportunities to find relief from this stress.

In September, the New England Journal of Medicine published an article, calling Intimate Partner Violence [“a pandemic within a pandemic,”](#) stating victims were trapped with their abusers and were unable to connect with helplines. According to this article, domestic violence

hotline calls dropped by 50% due to the inability of victims to escape the abuser to make a call.

Please note, this weekly column contains sensitive information regarding domestic violence, which may be triggering for some readers.

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