

GUEST VIEWPOINT: Prevention, intervention key to halting domestic violence <http://www.registerguard.com/web/opinion/26958393-47/violence-ipv-partner-wo-men-intimate.html.csp>

By Theya McCown
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October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This costly social epidemic, increasingly referred to as intimate partner violence, or IPV, claims thousands of American lives each year.

Awareness is the key to addressing any detrimental social phenomenon, because awareness lays a foundation for understanding and paving a way for education and prevention efforts.

Professionals and activists in the movement to oppose violence against women have spent more than three decades countering stigmas and misinformation that minimize, excuse and perpetuate IPV. These efforts, over time, have resulted in effective legislation, improved response and an increased collective consciousness, which have saved countless lives and supported violence survivor.

We have fallen short, however, in terms of prevention and intervention. As Deborah Capaldi notes in her Sept. 28 guest viewpoint headlined "Violence between partners is a serious health problem,"

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<http://www.registerguard.com/web/opinion/26902989-47/violence-partner-intimate-couples-physical.html.csp>

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the movement has all but stalled when it comes to stopping the violence before it starts, and current intervention methods are largely ineffective.

As we examine and pursue more effective ways to prevent and intervene with IPV, it is imperative that we maintain a thoughtful and thorough understanding of its dynamics. Capaldi's notion that more than half of such violence is mutual and "related to poor relationship" skills undermines what

the vast majority of experts in the field believe to be true.

While some studies seem to suggest women are as violent as men in intimate relationships, these studies are few and, most would argue, anomalous or even erroneous in research methodology.

In the most significant study to date, the Centers for Disease Control report that, in the United States, one in five women and one in 14 men will be victims of partner violence in their lifetimes. The same study also revealed that "the differences between women's and men's rates of physical assault by an intimate partner become greater as the seriousness of the assault increases."

While Capaldi notes that 30 percent of the 2,340 IPV deaths in 2007 were men, she fails to mention that this number includes men who were bystanders, men who died defending women, and men who took their own lives in murder-suicides, which account for a significant portion of the male deaths.

That information is relevant primarily because it must inform prevention and intervention efforts. The fact that IPV claims any lives - male or female - is tragic. It is a problem that our society continues to excuse and ignore.

Understanding intimate partner violence is not about blaming men. It is about deconstructing the very social constructs that perpetuate it. It is relevant that most such violence is perpetrated by men. It may be equally relevant that most men do not perpetrate it.

As professionals, educators, advocates, researchers - we must not lose focus. The question is not one of who is more violent. The fact remains that the majority of partner violence is committed by men against women. Ignoring, denying or skewing this truth does nothing to prevent or decrease IPV.

The questions we must continue to ask, then, are these: Why are a few men committing the majority of these crimes while most women and most men, in fact, are not perpetrators of partner violence? And how can we prevent violence?

Capaldi is correct in suggesting that prevention efforts ought to focus on adolescents - hopefully before they ever engage in violence in their intimate relationships. Intimate partner violence professionals, educators and service providers must foster strong and effective relationships with local school districts and other agencies that educate and inform young people.

Decades of research, combined with anecdotes and experiences of advocates and other professionals who consistently and exclusively work with IPV victims and perpetrators, indicate an obvious gender dynamic. Logically, the most relevant research now will reveal not if men are more violent in relationships - but why.

Are boys and young men lacking positive role models? Are they encouraged to engage in violent behavior? By whom? Is violent behavior rewarded or reinforced? If we are truly seeing a rise in violence perpetrated by women, why?

Intimate partner violence is a complex public health concern. It is deadly and costly. It affects everyone. And it is increasing in severity and frequency. Our quest for answers and improved prevention efforts is literally a matter of life and death. Our focus, then, ought not to be on a gender debate, but on working together to foster healthy relationships and a safe community.

For resources, support, or more information about how you can become involved in community solutions to ending IPV, visit the Womenspace website at www.womenspaceinc.org.

Theya McCown is coordinator of the Lane County Domestic Violence Council.

The council includes local elected officials, law enforcement officers, educators, advocates and other human service professionals.

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Comments

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1. Defective thinking

This opinion, from one involved in control of domestic violence, shows why

domestic violence has not been successfully eliminated. Between every line is the belief that domestic violence is a problem perpetrated by bad men.

Recognition that women in relationships get angry and abusive is largely absent.

The recent opinion of Ms. Capaldi on the same subject was a ray of sunshine that offered a breath of hope that the problem of domestic violence could be overcome. The problem quite profoundly lies in flawed relationships and not in evil men. Focus on the root cause and you can fix. McCown cannot bear to face the fact that both parties, via flawed interaction dynamics, create the violence problem. Yes, a woman can drive a man to violence. This fact must be recognized. This fact gives women responsibility for their actions. When they accept it. Violence will start to subside. Proper relationship dynamics are the key as is the profound need for women to accept responsibility for their actions and reactions.

The opinion of Theya McCown above shows that women are not ready to face facts and recognize their role in fighting. McCown spends significant time saying the most domestic violence is related to the male. What she means is that in most cases reported to police, it is the male who is arrested. This is not the same thing as saying that the male solely perpetrated the violence. The prevalence of female "injuries" reflects two things 1) women claim injury when a manly man would not, and 2) when a physical fight starts, the average man will beat the average female. The question of where the violence came from is rarely discussed. Who did what to start it off.

Can women prevent violence? Anyone who has watched a confrontation knows that the responses of all the parties involved affect potential escalation.

The assumption of the McCown's of the world is that the men have responsibility to control themselves regardless of provocation. She can say that but then we will always have domestic violence because the reality of human response is ignored. Virtually anyone can be provoked to violence with the right provocation.

Men and women must truly work together on this issue. Women must finally accept their responsibility. The actions of women contributing to

violence must finally be addressed. The societal response to a report of domestic violence should not be locking up the man. It should be dual court orders enjoining both parties from contact for several months. A second incident the court orders are permanent, marriage if any dissolved, assets divided.

Of course, before the violence, all parties need education on effective problem resolution. A course on such resolution should be required prior to marriage as a condition for the "license." The education must include compromise and de-escalation tactics.

Finally, women must accept responsibility for their actions and choices.

2. Mishmash

Accept personal responsibility?? In this pitiful culture??

Good luck with that.

3. Male Survivor

I suppose the people of Lane County might believe this hogwash. I know what it is to survive, as a man, the extreme abuses a woman is capable of. Granted, that was one woman; but there was no help for men in lane county, just more abuse by those who took the donations and even federal money, to assure that all would be helped.

But no, I had to leave the state to get help.

Man up dude, is what I got from local law enforcement. But I just gone through a major surgery and could barely feed myself; let alone defend myself from both physical and emotional abuses. But even if I had tried to defend myself, I would have ended up in jail facing domestic abuse charges.

I was well aware that she had visited this lane county organization because one of its members fore warned me she had been instructed to get me to hit her; and boy did she try. I had to leave; a family member got me to another state; and my children were promptly programed to believe I had abandon them.

It hurts, real bad, to talk about this. But the disinformation about men has to stop. To this day, there is no place for a man to go for help. You could get a few calls returned, until they know what its about, and then - silence.

4. BerserkerDuck

The inevitable backlash to Ms. Capaldi's exemplary recent article has started. I'm sure we will hear more in the near future.

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