

**DOMESTIC ABUSE:  
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP END THE CYCLE?**  
Deb Kratz, HSI Staff Writer

A divorced woman with three kids, a part-time job and a new boyfriend receives threatening calls from her ex-husband at work before he slashes her tires. A stay-at-home mom in her late 30's, who is married to a professional, tries to cover with make-up the bruises on her neck left by her husband's hands when he choked her the night before. A single person living with their partner is slapped and told in the heat of an argument, "I ought to shut you up for good!" A 16-year-old girl in her first serious relationship watches another student in a fast car drive by and is surprised when her boyfriend pulls her by the hair and yells, "You shouldn't look at other guys anymore!" Though these people lead very different lives, what they all have in common is that they are victims of domestic abuse. "In our work with families, there is no "typical" when it comes to domestic violence – it can happen to a person of any age, race, gender, sexual orientation, income level, educational background, or religion," states Don Jaehne, Supervisor of HSI Abuse Intervention and Recovery Services.

With nearly one-third of American women reporting being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives, and one in five female high school students reporting being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner, domestic abuse is happening at epidemic rates in our country. Research indicates that while both men and women can be abusers, and both can be victims - women are certainly at greater risk for serious injury or death. Washington County is not immune to domestic abuse. Last year, HSI staff provided assessment and treatment services for 300 offenders (80% were men) as well as many adults and children who were victims or witnesses of domestic or sexual abuse.

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviors that one partner uses to take and maintain power and control over another. When feeling threatened or powerless, the abuser has learned to act out aggressively because he or she lacks the skills to deal with stress and conflict in healthy ways. The couple may be married, living together, or just dating. The most serious violence often occurs after a couple has separated or divorced. Domestic abuse

can include physical attacks such as hitting, choking, kicking, pinching, pulling hair, twisting arms, biting, restraining, forced sexual relations, destruction of property, and harming pets. Emotional abuse may involve constant criticism, humiliation, creating disturbances at work, harassing telephone calls, spying or stalking, isolating the victim from outside friends, employment and family ties, withholding or limiting access to finances, intimidation, and threats against the victim or other family members.

There are many reasons that it is important for all of us to be aware of domestic abuse, and to take action to end the cycle. Domestic abuse is unfortunately common; untreated it may get worse, and may result in assault, rape and even murder. Abusers rarely change their behavior unless forced to, sometimes through pressure from family and friends, but often through legal charges that result when someone calls the police. “Victims often need the encouragement and support of outsiders, because leaving the relationship can be difficult for many reasons, including threats from the abuser to harm them or loved ones, limited resources, self-blame, fear of the unknown, shame or unhealthy attachment. Children are usually confused, scared, and upset when there is verbal and physical violence at home. Worse still, they may also be abused, may develop emotional and behavioral problems at home and at school, and may be at risk for becoming the next generation of victims and abusers,” states Jaehne. Family violence costs the nation from \$5 to \$10 billion annually in medical expenses police and court costs, shelters and foster care, sick leave, absenteeism, and non-productivity (*Medical News, American Medical Association, January, 1992*).

If you are concerned that a co-worker, neighbor, friend, loved one or family member may be a victim of domestic abuse, take action. Get involved. Be aware of the signs of abuse. Invite conversation about it. Listen without judging and show your concern. Tell them the abuse is not their fault. Let them know you are afraid for their safety and that of their children, because domestic abuse tends to get worse and rarely goes away on its own. Let them know it is a crime, and that they can seek protection and you are willing to help them find resources. When someone you care about is involved in an abusive relationship, it can be confusing, frustrating, and frightening, so be sure to get support for yourself, too.

When they are ready, it is important for victims to develop a safety plan to protect themselves and their children. This may include advising a neighbor to call 911 when there is an incident, creating a checklist of necessary items to take when leaving an abusive situation, considering legal options, documenting the abuse, obtaining a Court Order of Protection, or receiving information about how to reach a shelter.

Help is readily available for families who are caught in the cycle of domestic abuse. HSI Abuse Intervention and Recovery Services offers individual assessments, an 18-session Men's Domestic Abuse Treatment Group, a 12-session Women's Anger/Aggression Treatment Group, and if appropriate, individual, couple and family treatment. The Child/Family Advocacy Project offers a safe, supportive environment where children who have witnessed family violence can talk about their experiences with professionals who understand, giving them the opportunity to heal from the effects of domestic abuse.

Call **HSI at 651-777-5222** to receive more information about our services. You may also call **Tubman Family Alliance at 651-770-0777** for a wide range of victim services including support groups, legal advocacy, shelter and a 24 hour crisis line, or the **National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE**. You can make a difference! By listening to someone who is being abused and telling them you care, you let them know they are not alone. You plant seeds of hope when you give victims options for finding safety, healing, and a better life.

HSI, a nonprofit organization with 7 offices located throughout Washington County, annually serves more than 8,600 residents by providing multi-services for adults, children, adolescents, and families who face daily struggles related to emotional disorder, mental illness, chemical dependency, or domestic or sexual abuse. In addition, HSI provides services for the elderly and adults with disabilities, which include nutritional services (Meals on Wheels and congregate dining), adult day programs, and transportation. For more information about HSI call 651-777-5222 or visit our website at [www.hsicares.org](http://www.hsicares.org).

Statistics:

- 13 women and 10 children were murdered in Minnesota in 2003 as the result of domestic violence.
- Domestic violence victims account for over 25% of all violent crime victims in Minnesota.
- On average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in the United States every day.

Other resources:

- **Tubman Family Alliance – 651-770-0777** for local shelters, legal advocacy, support groups and 24-hour Crisis Line.
- **Women’s Advocates – 1-866-223-1111** for metro-wide domestic violence crisis line and shelter information.

Be aware:

**Domestic Violence is a crime in all states. If you see or hear an assault in progress, call 911 or the police.**

Watch for these signs of possible domestic abuse in the people you know:

- Her (or his) partner acts very controlling and puts her (him) down in front of other people.
- Her (or his) partner acts extremely jealous of others who pay attention to her (him).
- She (or he) becomes quiet when her (his) partner is around and seems afraid of making him (her) angry.
- She (or he) stops seeing her (his) friends and family members, becoming more and more isolated.
- She (or he) often cancels plans at the last minute.
- Her (or his) partner controls her (his) finances, behavior, and whom she (he) socializes with.
- You see him (or her) violently lose his (her) temper, striking or breaking objects.
- She (or he) often has unexplained injuries, or the explanations offered don’t quite add up.
- She (or he) has casually mentioned his (her) violent behavior but laughed it off as a joke.
- Her (or his) child is frequently upset or very quiet and withdrawn and won’t say why.