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Ending Domestic Violence—No Time to Waste

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No Time to Waste

It's the phone call we prayed would never happen. The family thought she had learned from her experience of domestic violence. She publicly declared that she was ready to start a new chapter without the abusive man in her life. She finally planned to leave. But her life tragically ended before she could do so.

Stories such as the one above are all too common. Domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence (IPV), is a national public health crisis that must be addressed.

IPV occurs when one partner in an intimate relationship abuses the other. The abuse can be physical/sexual, emotional/financial, stalking, or a combination of all these. Physical abuse may vary from less-severe forms such as shoving, pushing, and throwing, to the more aggressive forms of slapping, punching, and forced sexual intercourse, even murder. Emotional abuse involves persistent humiliation, shaming, threats, control of physical activity, control of money, and social isolation. Stalking involves a pattern of unwanted harassment or threats used by perpetrators causing fear or safety concerns in victims.

National IPV statistics are startling, with an estimated one in three women (43.6 million), and one in 10 men (11.8 million) having reported contact sexual violence, physical assault, and/or stalking in their lifetime.¹ Unfortunately, statistics are similar within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.²

Before It Happens

Research data indicate that IPV begins in adolescence, and education about healthy relationships must take place during this critical time. The goal is to prevent IPV before it begins. School-based social/emotional learning programs have demonstrated effectiveness in helping youth and young adults develop and practice the skills needed in healthy relationships.³ These skills include conflict resolution, healthy communication, and anger management.

Education about the characteristics of healthy relationships designed to raise awareness of behaviors that raise red flags are also useful. These behaviors include controlling behavior, excessive texting, forced social isolation, and bullying. Strong family-based programs have been shown to be vital for teens and young adult couples to promote positive relationship expectations.

Several protective factors have been shown to lower the probability of perpetrating or experiencing IPV. These factors include good school relationships and grades, the ability to express feelings, and high levels of empathy. These factors are useful to emphasize in discussion with parents.

A Vital Role

The church plays an important role in creating a safe community and an environment in which IPV is addressed, not covered up. An appropriate understanding of Scripture is also protective. Local churches must become aware of resources in their communities designed to help both victims and perpetrators. The message that violence of any kind will not be tolerated must be clearly sent. Perpetrators must experience appropriate consequences along with the help they need. enditnow, the Adventist Church's program to create awareness and help prevent IPV, must continue to be supported.

God models and is vitally interested in healthy relationships; and the church has an obligation to support and educate its members about the value He places upon them.

We must openly discuss what is happening within our church community and advocate for those who have experienced IPV. We also have the opportunity to develop programs that teach skills to develop healthy relationships to children, youth, young adults, and adults within families. We have no time to waste.

¹ S. G. Smith, X. Zhang, K. C. Basile, M. T. Merrick, J. Wang, M. Kresnow, J. Chen, "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief" (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/2015NISVdatabrief.html.

² R. D. Drumm, D. C. McBride, G. Hopkins, J. Thayer, M. Popescu, and J. Wrenn (2006). "Intimate Partner Violence in a Conservative Christian Denomination: Prevalence and Types." *Social Work and Christianity* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 233-251.

³ P. H. Niolon, M. Kearns, J. Dills, K. Rambo, S. Irving, T. L. Armstead, L. Gilbert, "Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices" (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control, 2017). Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf.

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