

October Brings Domestic Violence Awareness in Kodiak

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Just over a year ago a local survey shed light on the staggering number of domestic violence cases in Kodiak. The survey, which was done through UAA in partnership with various local organizations, found that 44 out of every 100 women in Kodiak have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or both. According to Rebecca Shields, the executive director of the Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center, that figure was actually a conservative estimate, as the survey only contacted English speakers with a telephone.

October has been Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Kodiak District Attorney Steve Wallace said it's a time to remind folks to speak up if they are personally experiencing domestic violence, or witnessing it with others.

"It's the being quiet about it that's so dangerous for people because people are suffering in silence. They're afraid to say something, they don't want to get the police involved in a situation or someone just feels awkward about well I have to live next door to these people and I don't want to be the guy who called the police or I don't want to be the woman who called the police because then they're going to be mad at me."

Wallace said one in ten of the cases that his office handles involve some form of domestic violence. He said the issue is so large that the Center for Disease Control lists domestic violence on its website.

"Intimate partner violence is listed as something that they study as something that affects our society in along with the other things that are infectious disease. Intimate partner violence is something that is a threat to the health of our country in terms of how people are reacting to each other and interacting with each other."

Mary Gray is the supervisor for the Office of Children's Services in Kodiak and said recent studies have found long term health effects of domestic violence, especially on children raised in homes where it is present.

"Research has been done, really the first of its kind that has documented that approximately 60 percent of the victims of domestic violence actually experience some form of chronic health issue. That's another reason why it's becoming so public, that there are just far reaching impacts to include basic health for victims, for women, for families, for entire communities."

Gray said 30 to 60 percent of domestic violence cases also involve

child abuse, which has lasting impacts on a child's cognitive and emotional development.

Rebecca Shields said the matter spreads beyond a family's home and is really a community problem that will take an aware community to help solve it.

"There's so much shame for families that are going through this and so much fear in coming forward and having people know their secret. And as a community if we can help people normalize what a healthy relationship looks like, so that they can better access the help that is available to them."

Shields said there are a lot of resources available here in the community, including the Kodiak Women's resource and Crisis Center, KANA and Providence Kodiak Mental Health Center and the Office of Children's Services, among others.

In general, if you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, Shields recommends you reach out to a community group and seek help before it escalates to the criminal justice system, or worse.