

Is the economic downturn exacerbating domestic violence?

- The economy does not cause domestic violence, but in abusive relationships, factors associated with a bad economy can increase frequency and severity of domestic violence incidents.
- Lay-offs and job loss can also mean that the batterer is home more and, therefore, has more time to keep track of or stalk the victim, and more opportunity for abuse.
- The economy can also limit options for victims to escape, especially in remote, rural areas of a state like North Dakota.
- We are experiencing an influx of people into ND for employment opportunities. This is causing a strain on resources available for victims of domestic violence; in particular, it's causing housing shortages which make it difficult for victims to flee.

Did the spring flooding of '09 in ND cause an increase in domestic violence?

- The flooding did not cause an increase in domestic violence, but in abusive relationships, factors associated with the added stress can cause an increase in frequency and severity of domestic violence incidents. Also, with loss of housing, victims can let abusers back in to the home or victims may have nowhere else to go but back to abusers.

The statistics show an increase in the past two years of both reported incidents of domestic violence, and of victims served by local crisis intervention centers. Why the increase? Does this mean that more women are being abused?

- An increase in services could reflect a community that supports victims as they come forward and one which holds batterers accountable. It could also mean we are reaching more victims of domestic violence through our public education efforts and through the training of other professionals who may come in contact with victims.

If 5,222 children were affected by domestic violence incidents, that is at least one child involved in each incident reported. How does domestic violence affect children, and what is being done to help them?

- Domestic violence affects every member of the family, including children. Children are not just witnesses to domestic violence; they are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence affects every family member.
- Children react to their environment in different ways, and reactions can vary depending on the child's age and gender. The trauma they experience can show up in emotional, behavioral, social and physical disturbances and affect their development into adulthood.

- Services are available for children through domestic violence programs. Some of these services include: activity programs, prevention and educational programs in the schools, and peer support groups. Programs are also in place for kids to re-establish relationships with non-custodial parents. Local visitation centers give children the opportunity to begin to establish non-violent memories of their parents in a safe environment.

Emergency protection orders increased last year over 2008 by 16%. Why the increase? Does this mean that the court system is getting more involved with cases of domestic violence?

- A 16% increase of emergency protection orders may reflect an increased severity of domestic violence incidents in North Dakota. It may also reflect the number of advanced trainings being conducted with advocates, law enforcement, and judges across the state.
- Protection orders work in a majority of cases. Protection orders are an effective tool when they are enforced. A recent study conducted in Kentucky showed civil protective orders saved the state \$85 million in costs that would have been expected from partner violence had there been no civil protective order issued. (*The 2009 Kentucky Civil Protective Order Study, Funded by the National Institute of Justice*).

In a lot of relationships, the women are just as violent as the men. Your statistics show that 94% of the victims were women. What about the male victims? Do your numbers reflect how many men are being abused?

- While a majority of victims are women, programs across the state provided services to 259 male victims of domestic violence, about 5% of the total. This number has not only been consistent in the past couple of years in ND but also on a national level.
- In many cases in which women finally resort to violence against their abusers, they are defending themselves or protecting their children. We do not condone violence, no matter who commits it, but we must remain aware of the possibility of defensive actions.

Is there a link between drinking and domestic violence? Couples get drunk, they fight, someone gets hit. Your statistics show alcohol was involved in 36% of the new cases.

- Battering is a socially learned behavior and is not the result of substance abuse. Men who batter may use alcohol abuse as an excuse for their violence. They attempt to rid themselves of responsibility for the problem by blaming it on the effects of alcohol. On the other hand, alcohol and other drugs are serious risk factors for either or both partners and can significantly increase the possibility for deadly harm.

About half of the abusers had a history of abusive behavior with other adults, including former partners. Why aren't women more careful about who they are dating and marrying and why don't women just leave?

- Batterers prey on women who are vulnerable and lack self confidence. They can be very charming and convincing. Often, their affection is very intense and can seem genuine. Batterers are not likely to divulge that they have abused a former partner, but if they do, they will certainly find a way to make it appear that the former partner was to blame.
- Many women stay for the simple reason that they fear they or their children will be killed or seriously injured if they attempt to leave.
- Women often remain in abusive relationships because of economics. A woman with children who leaves an abusive partner is likely to face severe economic hardships.
- A woman stays because she loves the person and truly believes he will change. Other reasons she stays are: she doesn't want to break up the family, she took a vow, religious beliefs, embarrassment, shame. A woman may also feel she has no place to go.
- There are numerous reasons why women stay. But the problem is really with the question. It places the blame on the victim and ignores the fact that domestic violence is a crime. Instead of asking why she stays, we should be asking, "Why does he abuse her?" and "What are we, as a community, doing to provide safety for the victims and accountability for the batterers?"