

The headline on November 4 read: "Husband-father left country following Novi triple murder". It shocked the community of Novi where a homicide had not been reported since 2003. But unfortunately it did not shock me.

We can all guess at the sequence of events. I do not know what happened in this sad story. I only know three people are dead; a 37 year old mother and wife and her 12 and 14 year old children and that they had extensive head and neck trauma. They say there was no forced entry so they assume the victims knew the assailant.

As the president of HAVEN I work to end domestic violence and sexual abuse every day. After decades working with DV victims, there are many things that were brought to mind by the headline and the story. Let's assume that this is a case of domestic violence, even though I will state clearly that the case is still open.

We know from the story that the husband seemed to be out of work and the family vehicle repossessed. When relationship roles change and power shifts, batterers can find themselves at a loss. The batterer will try many ways to maintain power/control in the relationship. Domestic Violence involves many forms of violence - emotional, sexual, verbal, financial and physical. We may never know if this family experienced one or more of these battering tactics.

What I do know is that 1 in 5 women killed or severely injured by an intimate partner had no warning, the fatal or near fatal incident was the 1st physical violence they had experienced.

What I do know is that 1/3 of Michigan families experience DV. There are over 100 domestic violence-related homicides each year in Michigan.

What I do know is that in the majority, 61% in a 2004 FBI study, of female homicide victims are wives or intimate acquaintances of their killer.

What we need to be aware of is DV, even when it is not reported, happens in every neighborhood. No one knows what is happening behind the closed doors of a neighbor. Victims generally do not report their initial victimization but typically suffer multiple assaults and/or related victimization before reaching out. Two national studies - estimate that less than 30% of domestic violence incidents are reported to police. Reasons include: 1) it is a private or personal matter 2) fear of reprisal 3) desire to protect suspect, and 4) belief police won't do anything.

Why we need be aware of the dynamics and prevalence of domestic violence. It's everybody's business - others involved in an individual/family member's life might have clues and can offer support and intervention (neighbors, kids teachers, medical personnel, etc). We must all get involved and be proactive.

The fact that the first time we often learn of a history domestic violence in a relationship is when a homicide has occurred is further proof of the need for primary prevention. To stop this violence we must educate kids when they are young, and create general community awareness of the crime. Victims must be made aware of the support available for themselves and their families. Our programs and services at HAVEN are designed for prevention, awareness, safety and support.

I am saddened by these headlines. Aren't you? Let's do all we can so they disappear. To learn about some of our initiatives, visit <http://www.haven-oakland.org>.

Beth Morrison
President/CEO
HAVEN