



Commentary

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE....Is Not Just a Family Problem....IT'S A CRIME!

Shay Bintliff MD

Yes, we all are saturated with the news coverage of the recent, heinous murder of Cathalene Ann Pacheco. And yes, you all would rather laugh than read more about domestic violence; but I am moved to dedicate this column to her memory and hope that something in today's column will help in the prevention of more violence. I believe it can be stopped.

The following was a response to an inquiry I sent to family physicians in 1991 when we were trying to educate physicians in the diagnosis and treatment of family violence: One physician said that she had been trying to find ways to influence the course of violent relationships. For the past few years she had been asking young women in her practice about their boyfriends on their routine well-person and contraception visits. To quote her: "I ask these women what they like about the men they are dating. As they respond, I often hear hints that concern me about the potential for future violence. If a woman or girl tells me that her boyfriend "really cares a lot about me because he tells me that he really needs me," I ask more about jealousy and behaviors that may be warning signs. If there is any hint that the boyfriend is the "jealous type" or is curtailing her social interactions, I take the opportunity to educate her about the path from JEALOUSY TO VIOLENCE. I try to listen for the signals that will tell me how best to phrase the education for that particular person, especially in view of their culture. I frequently use the line, "You know it may seem flattering or cute that you are so important to him that he gets upset at the idea that you could leave him and see other guys, but in the long run that can be a drag! Sometimes when a guy is like that he gets more and more possessive and after awhile he doesn't let you see your girlfriends and he doesn't even want you to see your family too much." I often get some kind of affirming or agreeing response at this point, that either they can see that behavior coming, they have experienced it

already, or they have seen it in other men dating their friends. I then usually will say that I think women need to learn that jealousy is a warning sign of a man who may become abusive in the future. I then take this opportunity to ask if they think any form of physical violence is OK. Most all will say "no, absolutely not." This is then an opportunity to say that what begins as a slap can escalate to a beating, then to more severe beatings, and then sometimes to death. It also is a good time to discuss the concept of intimidation by verbal abuse and/or throwing things or destroying objects that belong to them. It is immediately clear which women already have experienced such behaviors. Or many will respond, "my Dad used to do that to my Mom." Don't we wish every doctor used this approach with their patients? It is clear to me that this doctor's interaction with her patients helped many women to avoid abusive men.

Now, I know that many of you men out there are saying that men are not the only ones who are violent, and this is true. However, 95% of abused victims are women. I might also add that abusive relationships also occur in the gay and lesbian community as well. Not all family violence end in murder, as did Cathalene's. Much of it ends in lives that are dismantled by fear, shame, isolation, and pain. Perhaps drug abuse dulls the pain. In many cases, suicide eventually stops the pain. Tragically, children who experience abuse at the hands of their parents, and/or witness abuse of a parent, often grow up to be the next generation of abusers. This is why the cycle of violence must be stopped. Each of us have a role to play in ending abuse.

If you are a victim, reach out for help, now!! If you know or suspect a friend or relative is being abused, tell them about the local Crisis and Help phone lines. But tell them in PRIVATE! The Help Lines are available on each island. Every person deserves to be treated with respect. It is never acceptable to abuse anyone. Aloha friends ... a hui hou.

Editor's Note:

The above article was published in a recent issue of the North Hawaii News and is reproduced with permission. Shay Bintliff's weekly column is "Laughter is the Best Medicine." She may be contacted at 808-882-1177 in Waimea or at barshay@aloha.net

Norman Goldstein, M.D., Editor

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