

Recognizing the pattern of abuse

"Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behavior. Usually, domestic violence is not an isolated incident."

Kate Hamilton
Domestic Violence Liaison
Mill Creek Police Department

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Some people — usually they are women — don't even realize they are being victimized.

That's one of the challenges of helping those affected by domestic violence.

Domestic violence is one of those crimes that its perpetrators build up to sometimes reaching a level of physical

v i o l e n c e
after long
periods of
v e r b a l
assaults and
imposing
limits on
the victim's
freedom,
said Kate
Hamilton,
detective at
the Mill
C r e e k
P o l i c e
D e p a r t -
m e n t .

Domestic
violence calls in
Mill Creek,
including verbal
and physical
incidents:

- 1999, 100 calls
- 2000, 79 calls
- 2001, 101 calls

Hamilton has worked for the MCPD for four years and as DV liaison for the last three.

"Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behavior," said Kate Hamilton. "Usually, domestic violence is not an isolated incident. It's a whole pattern of behavior. It's really creepy."

She said people in abusive relation-

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ships may be required by their mate to carry a cell phone or pager so they can always be traced wherever they are. They may not have their own checking accounts, and might depend on a monetary allowance from their mate. In some scenarios, the victim is cut off from family and friends long before any violence occurs in that relationship.

They may not be allowed to call friends or have lunch dates.

"People perceive domestic violence as physical and it's not," Hamilton said.

Their abuser may say things like "you're ugly. I don't know why I ever married you," Hamilton said.

That verbal beating is considered the start of a pattern of abuse that can eventually lead to a physical assault.

Hamilton said Mill Creek does not get a lot of physical

domestic calls.

But that is not to say the city's affluence shields it from the presence of dysfunction in the home.

She said, "domestic violence is everywhere. It doesn't matter your economic status, your education level."

However, according to the American Bar Association which uses national statistics, past and current victims of domestic violence are over-represented in the welfare population. The majority of welfare recipients have experienced domestic abuse in their adult lives, and a high percentage are currently abused.

Victims experience higher levels of health or mental health problems such as a physical disability, or serious or acute depression, according to the American Bar Association.

Hamilton said there is a stereotype that DV incidents are "an anger issue. That's part of the issue, but it's not always about anger. It's a learned pattern of behavior."

Many abusers were once victims of violence in their childhood homes. And a large percentage of teenage women in dating situations experience the brunt of that learned behavior.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, 40 percent of women between the ages of 14 and 17 report knowing someone who's been beat or hit by a boyfriend.

The intimate nature of violence inside the home is what makes it less likely people will report it. It is "under-reported because so many people consider it a family matter," Hamilton said. Further, she said, "a lot of cultures consider it acceptable to control women. A lot of cultures consider it really a secret matter."

Some men are victimized by domestic violence as well, but women are 95 percent more likely than men to be the victim of a domestic assault.

Women more likely than men to experience abuse in the home

- Nearly 1 in 3 adult women experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood.
- 15 - 50 percent of abused women report interference from their partner with education, training or work.
- Welfare studies show that abused women do seek employment, but are unable to maintain it. It is possible that domestic violence presents a barrier to sustained labor market participation.
- 28 percent of all annual violence against women is perpetrated by intimates, and 5 percent of all annual violence against men is perpetrated by intimates.
- Women ages 19-29 reported more violence by intimates than any other age group.
- Domestic violence is statistically consistent across racial and ethnic boundaries.

Source: American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence.

Domestic violence calls are one of the most challenging calls an officer takes.

They're more dangerous than many other types of calls because emotions are running so high, Hamilton said. They are also tricky to sort out — police have to look at every detail inside the home to find out what happened. The abuser may say the victim is lying to shirk responsibility in the incident.

Hamilton said police look at everything in the home - are items broken? are there children there and are they crying? does anyone have any bruises or marks on them?

When it's determined that an assault has occurred, police arrest the "primary aggressor." Defining who that is requires a careful look at all the evidence, including statements from all involved, and demeanor of all household members including children.

"How are the kids acting - are they cowering behind mom or are they cowering behind dad?" Hamilton said.

Both the victim and the

primary aggressor are given informational pamphlets by Mill Creek Police, Hamilton said. The pamphlets define behaviors associated with domestic violence and give information about where victims can get help.

Hamilton follows up a few days after an incident. Her practice is to contact the victim directly because a voice mail message could put that person in danger of being attacked again. When she does get in contact with a victim, she usually asks first, "can you talk?" In other words, is the victimizer listening?

She said there have been times in her career when police end up returning to the same house over and over.

"I think one of the harder things for law enforcement to deal with is it's a pattern, and they go back to the same house again, and again, and again, and again. It's not so much frustrating as it breaks my heart," Hamilton said. "Because I see people in a rut and I can understand, as a female with children, why that happens."

ARE YOU IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP AND... THE MILL CREEK POLICE