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Domestic Abuse Locally Versus Nationally

According to a study conducted by Breiding, Chen, and Black, approximately 10% of women in America have been raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and approximately 17% of women have experienced sexual violence other than rape. Furthermore, about 50% of women and 50% of men in America have dealt with psychological aggression from an intimate partner (Breiding et al.). A significant 24.3% of women in America have experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner along with about 14% of men (Breiding et al.). Unfortunately, the list of sobering statistics goes on. This paper discusses how the trend of domestic abuse has emerged and persisted both nationally and locally as well as who has been effective in dealing with the issue. Additionally, this paper entails some of my personal experiences that have provided me with insight.

There is an insufficient amount of information about domestic abuse in Mankato, Minnesota. However, after meeting with Kirby Hurd, volunteer coordinator at Committee Against Domestic Abuse (CADA) in Mankato, Minnesota, I was able to gather some information about the service statistics in 2016. The information provided by Hurd gives insight to the overall issue of domestic abuse in Mankato. CADA served upwards of *2,759 victims* of domestic abuse around the area of Mankato in the year 2016. Specifically, the Emergency Shelter of CADA served 230 victims of domestic and sexual violence. Blue Earth County Advocates served 1,304 victims. Brown County Advocates served 358 victims. The Waseca County Advocate served 248 victims. The Fairbault County Advocate served 224 victims. The Nicollet County Advocate served 122 victims. The Watonwan County Advocate served 171 victims. The Le Sueur County Advocate served 73 victims. The Sibley County Advocate served 84 victims. The Keep Me Safe (KMS) center provided services to a total of 84 children throughout the span of 780 visitations in the locations of Mankato, New Ulm, and St. Peter. I have listed out these specific statistics to put a point across: Domestic abuse is still extremely prominent in today’s society. There is a trend of women and children receiving majority of the services in each county, indicating they are the population that is most commonly affected by domestic abuse (Hurd).

The questions of “Why?” or “How?” are asked very often. These questions are difficult to answer specifically for the Mankato area because it is an issue that the entire world faces. According to Gina Stepp, there are several factors that contribute to abuse within families: *stress, privacy, law,* and *history*. When humans are *stressed*, they react negatively because humans’ stress-response systems are directly connected to systems that analyze moods and actions of the surrounding environment. Additionally, family/domestic violence is not uncommon because of the tradition of family members spending most of their time together and having several emotional ties, which are usually significant emotional stressors (Stepp). Unfortunately, because of these ties, family violence and domestic violence are usually the most harmful forms of violence. Most of domestic violence takes place in the *privacy* of people’s homes. This also makes it very difficult to measure the prevalence of family/domestic violence (Stepp). Furthering the prominence is the fact that family violence has not been prohibited by *law* in several countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Haiti, Iran, Kenya, Pakistan, and several others (Alfred). Finally, the *history* of domestic abuse in families strongly influences the likelihood that domestic abuse will continue to persist. A professor from Massachusetts who is in the Department of Criminology explains that children who are exposed to parental violence rate “as high as 15 times above the national average” in physical abuse (qtd. in Stepp). A few other factors that contribute to domestic abuse are “lower socio-economic status, cultural attitudes condoning male violence against women…and failure to learn effective problem-solving and anger-management strategies in childhood” (Stepp). On a local level, the best predictor of domestic abuse is socioeconomic status. Hurd says the most common trend she sees among the victims that seek services through CADA is families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The main factors that keep the issue of domestic abuse from being resolved in the area of Mankato are *funding* and *stigma.* Hurd explained that Minnesota doesn’t receive a sufficient amount of *funding* to support the stakeholders that serve domestic abuse survivors. Hurd also said that the issue is very commonly misunderstood which creates a significant amount of *stigma.* For instance, people who report being abused are usually seen as liars and attention-seekers. Additionally, people think that perpetrators aren’t capable of committing such a crime.

According to the *City of Mankato, 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan,* the main stakeholder in Mankato, Minnesota for domestic abuse is Committee Against Domestic Abuse; CADA provides several resources for survivors of domestic abuse, mainly shelter and advocacy. Furthermore, the Mankato City Council has met with CADA staff over the past several years to discuss expanding the shelter space. CADA is the only stakeholder that is identified in the *City of Mankato, 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan.* Other stakeholders in and around Mankato, Minnesota include Theresa House and Welcome Inn, LeSueur County Victim Program, HOPE Center, Southern Valley Alliance for Battered Women, Ruth’s House, and Crisis Resource Center of Steele County (*DomesticShelters.org).*

Has Mankato been able to effectively deal with the issue in comparison to other communities? As discussed earlier, Minnesota deals with a lack of funding that many other states do not, which means they don’t have sufficient funds to deal with the issue as effectively as other parts of the United States might (Hurd). On a national level, Minnesota is not as effective as other areas of the country. To improve the effectiveness, Minnesota should increase funding for organizations, such as non-profits, that serve domestic abuse survivors (Hurd). Another thing that could increase the effectiveness of dealing with domestic abuse is to provide thorough education to the population of Minnesota. A lot of people in Minnesota are completely oblivious to the idea that domestic abuse is still very prominent in today’s world. Specifically, rural communities are significantly undereducated in the topic of domestic abuse. This leads me to the effectiveness of dealing with domestic abuse on a local level. It is very evident that rural communities are notably less effective when it comes to domestic abuse. This lack of effectiveness is due to several factors including lack of education, lack of funding, lack of resources, and lack of anonymity. People that live in rural communities often have to travel many miles to utilize any resources. Further complicating the issue is the fact that everyone knows everyone in small town communities. People of rural areas often don’t seek help simply because of the fact that they don’t want anyone to find out (Hurd). To improve rural communities in regard to dealing with domestic abuse, the best help would be to inform the people of the resources that are in the surrounding towns and work on raising awareness (Hurd).

I had the opportunity to volunteer at Committee Against Domestic Abuse for several weeks throughout this semester. My position at CADA is a childcare volunteer. For this position, I watch several children while their mothers attend a group support meeting every Tuesday for a little over two hours. The number of kids I watch ranges anywhere from three kids to fifteen kids. Their ages are anywhere from a few months to fourteen. It has been very insightful and eye-opening to work with these children. I have met several children of all different ethnicities, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, personalities, abilities, etc. A few specific instances stand out to me. I met a young girl around the age of three who always takes her shoes off because her feet are filled with bruises and sores. There is no way of knowing what the bruises and sores are from, but I usually can’t stop my mind from wandering to the worst case scenario. I have also met a young boy around the age of seven who can barely talk, and I can’t keep my mind from thinking about why this is the case. Another female infant would always show up with a diaper on that looked as if it hadn’t been changed in two days. In contrast, there are other young children that show up, and you would never guess they have been exposed to abuse. Perhaps some of the children have completely different exposures and experiences. I am currently enrolled in a developmental psychology class, and I have learned an incredible amount about how children are impacted by stressful events in their childhood, specifically, how children are affected for the rest of their lives if they are exposed to a significant amount of violence. Another thing that I have noticed about the families who attend these meeting is that majority of the families are very obviously socioeconomically disadvantaged. The children often come with shoes that are worn almost completely to the sole. A lot of the clothes that the children were dressed in said “CADA” in black sharpie, indicating that the clothes were being borrowed from the shelter. Furthermore, a large amount of the mothers who attend these meetings need to be picked up by a cab provided by CADA. I have also noticed that it is very common for the mothers to stock up on food that has been donated to the shelter. These simple observations don’t mean that all of these families are unquestionably disadvantaged financially or that these children are surely neglected; they are simply observations that make my mind turn.

I am still volunteering at CADA in Mankato, but soon the group support meetings will come to an end. I plan to stay at CADA until I graduate from Minnesota State University, Mankato. I have talked to Kirby Hurd about attending training meetings that will equip me with the skills needed to work directly with the victims of domestic abuse. I have already learned so much through this experience and want to continue this very educational and sobering opportunity at CADA.

Generally speaking, Minnesota is fairly consistent with the rest of the country in domestic abuse rates; furthermore, Mankato is fairly consistent with the rest of Minnesota. There are several reasons why domestic abuse is still prominent in today’s society including stress, laws, privacy, socioeconomic status, history, and cultures. Although there are more resources for victims of domestic abuse in the current society than ever before, stigma and funding keep the issue from being resolved completely. Because of the lack of funding in Minnesota, other areas of the country are more successful in dealing with domestic abuse. Furthermore, rural areas of Minnesota struggle incredibly in dealing with domestic abuse. I am a member of a rural community, so volunteering at Committee Against Domestic Abuse was a very educational experience. As discussed throughout this paper, education is the start to minimizing and possibly eliminating domestic abuse.

Works Cited

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