

Domestic abuse a personal, not social manifestation

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One can't blame poverty for domestic partner abuse. That is the fault of the individual who can't control his or her temper for various reasons and winds up taking out frustration at those closest -- the wife or domestic partner and the children.

Barb Mueske, formerly with the Butte-Silver Bow Health Department and currently with the AWARE Program, said that during 2003-2004 Fiscal Years there were 950 poverty patients -- that is 950 individuals whose incomes fall below federal poverty guidelines -- and for 2004 through March, 2005, the poverty patient numbers had risen to 1,066.

One of the central issues, at this time, is how to obtain treatment for batterers. Theoretically, according to Montana State Law, it appears the batterer is responsible for his/her own treatment.

The law, in part, provides, "The offender shall complete a minimum of 40 hours of counseling. The counseling may include attendance at psychoeducational groups, .. in addition to the assessment (of the need for counseling) and counseling that holds the offender accountable for the offender's violent or controlling behavior must be:

"With a person licensed under Title 37, chapter 17, 22, or 23," or "With a professional person as defined in 53-21-102" or "In a specialized domestic violence intervention program."

That's where part of the controversy takes hold.

Mueske and Butte-Silver Bow County Attorney argue that because in excess of 90 percent of batterers wind up back in the home, the government is obligated to step in, when appropriate, and provide the mandated counseling if the batterer can't afford it.

On the other hand, Tonya Geraghty, director of Safe Space, Butte-Silver Bow Commissioner Laura Lee Dunlap and Commissioner Charlie O'Leary argue that the batterers must pay for the counseling and treatment themselves.

The counter-argument from McCarthy is that the batterers really don't care if they receive treatment, thus, they aren't going to seek it.

But, they will return to the home and re-commit the inappropriate behavior.

Geaghty argues that in other communities, the batterers are required to pay. She said of the other locations, ten were in Montana, one was on an Indian Reservation, and none had any help from the community."

Geraght sees the question as one of accountability and argues that since the victim receive no help, neither should the batterers.

Butte has been fortunate over the past few years because Community Counseling and Correctional Services (CCCS), under direction of Mike Thatcher has provided counseling to batterers for free.

But, Thatcher says, the counseling is expensive and his staff has been professionally trained, so his organization is no longer able to provide free service.

Last year Thatcher told the Butte-Silver Bow council of commissioners that CCCS would not be able to afford to continue to provide free batterers' counseling because of the costs associated with training staff and providing materials to batterers.

Figures at CCCS show that it cost CCCS \$3,654 to train three staff members and that CCCS spent another \$4,335 to provide material to batterers during the period 2000-2005.

Furthermore, the figures show that at per-hour costs of \$15-\$20 for counseling, CCCS had spend \$36,920 during 2000-2005 and another \$19,200 for rent during the same period.

And, CCCS does collect from batterers, although not at the same rate funds are expended to meet Butte-Silver Bow's needs.

In 2000 the numbers saw no collections, in 2001 no collections, \$7,926 in 2002, \$6,020 in 2003, \$4,855 in 2004 and \$2,450 for Fiscal 2005 through April.

The collections amount to 33.15 percent of actual costs of providing service.

The number of batterers treated in 2000 is not available, in 2001 there were 41 batterers, in 2002 63 batterers, in 2003 58 batterers, in 2004 75 batterers and in 2005 (through April) 48 batterers.

While there is no connection between battering and poverty that can be proven, statistics provided by Mueske show that she reviewed 46 patient

charts for this series and found that 16 percent had "pretty high" reports of battering.

And, she said, the family planning clinic in Butte has the "highest poverty level of all family planning clinics in the state with 76 percent (of those being treated for battering-related causes).

And, the rate continues to rise, for example, with 950 cases in 2003 compared with 1,066 in 2004.