Love Does Not Hurt

No Name

Palm Beach State College

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To have and to hold until death do us part. These are some of the vows that many couples take blissfully at the beginning of their marriage. Vows spoken of love and hope for a lifetime of happiness. In some cases, these moments of celebration are soon replaced with cycles of control, manipulation, fear, and abuse. Domestic violence is not limited to married couples. This form of violence is often hidden and can happen in any intimate partner relationship. The cycle of abuse in intimate partner relationships is best combated before it begins. Early and continuing education along with community resources are needed to help end the cycle of abuse.

The first step in finding a solution to end abusive intimate partner relationships is to recognize that it can happen to anyone. Victims of domestic violence can be of any sex, race, culture, religion, age, education, economic, or marital status. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2015) reports, “In the United States, an average of 20 people are physically abused by intimate partners every minute” (NCADV, 2015). The NCADV (2015) defines domestic violence as “the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another” (NCADV, 2015). This systematic pattern of power and control continues and often escalates until the victim seeks help to leave or dies at the hand of the abuser. Anyone could become a victim of romantic relationship abuse. Due to the fact that anyone could potentially find him or her self in an abusive relationship at some point in their life early education is needed.

Early education to promote safe and healthy relationships is critical in the fight against intimate partner violence. Some victims find themselves in abusive relationships early on in their dating lives. For others it can be a learned behavior from his or her home environment.
Education on the characteristics of a healthy relationship need to be started in the primary education level and continued through the secondary. Not only would this education help young children learn what healthy relationships are it will also assist in forming friendships as they learn how to set and respect boundaries. As Gutmann (2006) explains, “In early childhood children learn problem-solving, emotional management, and social skills that form the basis of their relationships later in life, and it is also the time when children form views on gender roles, relationships, and the acceptability of aggression and violence” (Gutman et al., 2006). Education could be introduced early with simple play groups involving toys and skits teaching the young children people skills and how to set boundaries. Advancing the educational content thru each grade level based on age appropriateness. During this stage of life, children and young adults hold more value to the relationships with their friends than with anyone else. Youth education that is conducted in a setting amongst their peers will hold more value and ultimately prove to have long term effectiveness if they collectively buy into the concept presented and are able to collaborate with each other. Another key component in early prevention of imitate partner abuse is teaching minors that love does not hurt. Teaching what love is not will provide the very foundation in an individual to recognize early warning signs of a potential abusive relationship. Recognizing early warning signs of an unhealthy relationship will empower the individual to seek help and remove him or herself from harm.

Once the primary and secondary education levels of intimate partner abuse education are completed the next step is ongoing community education. Community education on this level is more geared towards those potential victims who are currently or have been in an abusive relationship. Community education can be performed using multiple media and social outlets. The most effective communication source for mass distribution of information against domestic
violence is social media. For an example, memes can be created to include an emotional element that will convey the message effectively and leave a lasting memory. This meme strikes emotions quickly. It draws the reader in with all the abusive things happening to her then ends with a phrase that causes confusion. This is the same type of emotional confusion the perpetrator causes the victim during the cycle of abuse. The victim of abuse experiences a cycle of buildup anger, lashing out, calming down and a honeymoon phase of forgiveness.

The more potential victims that are able to view these types of educational pieces the more he or she is exposed to the fact that help is available. Another example of continuing community education is utilizing websites. Websites can be accessed anytime and include key information on what abuse is and where to get help. As Smith and Segal (2018) introduce this type of web-based education, “noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step to ending it. If you recognize yourself or someone you know in the following descriptions of abuse, reach out now. There is help available. No one should live in fear of the person they love” (Smith & Segal, 2018). Ongoing community education to recognize the signs of abuse and how to seek help is a critical piece in the fight against domestic violence. Numerous potential victims are able to be reached using social media and websites providing education abuse tactics and resources available to help.

One area that requires additional focus for community education is intimate partner and martial rape. Martial rape or sexual consent under coercion is against the law in the United States. Yet in many cultures and religious structures there still remains a belief that a wife cannot be raped by her husband. The act of sex is viewed as an obligation of the marriage. Often women
are raised to believe that once married she is essentially owned by her husband in every way. As Thistlethwaite (2016) reports, “between 10 and 14 percent of married women experience rape in marriage.” The same probability of sexual abuse in any intimate partner relationship needs to be addressed with community education. This abuse is hidden and often shows no physical signs. The victim experiencing this form of intimate partner abuse often lives with confusion between being loved and abused by his or her partner. With early and continuing community education sexual abuse in relationships can be defined, the potential victim reached and resources offered for those who seek help.

An additional area in need of community education is for the abuser him or herself. More often education is geared towards the victims. Men or women that are abusive in relationships often were victims or lived in an abusive environment at one time in her or her life. Being able to recognize the correlation between being abused and abusing is part of the breaking the cycle of abuse. The perpetrator of the abuse may want to seek help but does not know where to find help. Having community resources available to educate what constitutes abuse and what tools can be used to end the cycle of abuse is one part of the solution. The National Domestic Violence Hotline (2014) reports, “anger management courses do not address issues of power and control within a relationship, which are the source of domestic violence. A better option would be an intervention program that does focus on these issues, which are often referred to as Batterer Intervention & Prevention Programs (or BIPPs).” BIPPs, if available in communities, are not advertised enough. Advertisement will not only make an awareness of resources available but potentially provide encouragement to end abusive behaviors. These programs work best if the abuser wants to change. If someone wants to change resources need to be readily available to
assist. The community needs to be educated that these programs are available for those who seek help to stop abusing his or her loved one.

Community education and resources are not the end to domestic violence. An opposing view could argue that law enforcement is the key to ending domestic violence. As Rosen (2016) exclaims, “it is not new laws, but the enforcement of them that needs to be addressed.” Rosen further argues, “It may take another century before violence against women seems as barbaric and unacceptable as slavery does today.” Enforcement of the current laws could help certain situations of intimate partner abuse; however, police officers need to be aware of the abuse in order to enforce the laws. At times victims of domestic violence are unaware of the resources available or may just be too afraid to seek help. Preventing intimate partner abuse before it begins is the key to combating the problem. Early education is part of the solution by empowering youth not to become victims or perpetrators of abuse. Continuing community education on resources available for current victims to seek help will be more effective than the change of unprompted police involvement.

In conclusion, more community education on the topic of intimate partner abuse is needed. Early education on a primary level is needed educated our youth on healthy relationships and to empower them to not become victims of abuse in their lifetime. Continuing community education is needed to nurture an awareness of whom the victims are and what help is available. Marital and intimate partner rape remain least talked about in community education on abuse. Providing education that no one has to have sex regardless of the relationship status can empower victims in these situations. Lastly, educating the community, victims and perpetrators of abuse on the resources available to those who seek help. This is key to a great reduction of
multigenerational cycles of abusive relationship occurrences not the enforcement of laws. After all, love is not supposed to hurt.
References


