

Reality of domestic violence brought home by prosecutor

By Kathryn Reed

Domestic violence. It's not an isolated issue. It's not a private issue. It's a community issue.

That was the message Lisa Serafini, El Dorado County deputy district attorney, drilled into the women gathered for the Thursday meeting of Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra.

Serafini, who has prosecuted domestic violence cases, said the number of people on the South Shore dealing with alcohol or some other substance abuse problem, as well as mental health issues is high based on the population. Those factors often lead to domestic violence.



EDC Deputy DA
Lisa Serafini
talks Oct. 21
about domestic
violence.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

"We have a lot more (cases) than we should. You can't blame the casinos for it. You have to blame the people who conduct themselves that way," Serafini said.

The key criminal issues are the threat of physical abuse, actual physical abuse and sexual abuse. But emotional abuse, financial abuse, isolation – they all come under domestic violence.

Serafini said it's a horrible myth to believe someone, usually a woman, chooses to stay in an abusive situation. Fear is often what keeps her in the relationship. Potentially losing custody of her children, even the love she once had for her abuser, and possible financial security are other reasons women stay.

It has been proven that leaving the abusive person can be the most life-threatening moment, Serafini said.

She pointed to two cases in the past few years – one in South Lake Tahoe, the other Stateline – where the woman left the man who was abusing her. The first case almost ended with the perpetrator fatally slashing the victim's neck with a machete in front of her child. She lived. The woman in the second case died after she was beaten with a hammer at her casino job where her ex showed up.

Although these women did what authorities and social agencies advise – get out of the abusive relationship – they prove Serafini's point that leaving can be dangerous.

It's a community problem because the victim and abuser live here. They work here. They shop here. Their children go to school here.

Millions of children each year in the United States witness some form of abuse in their home – verbal or physical – and may be one of the victims. Those children are then likely to repeat the abuse or seek out abusive relationships.

Behavioral issues with these students often crop up at school – potentially taking time away from classmates.

Domestic violence calls can take a lot of time for law enforcement. Serafini recommends people call the cops if they hear abuse going on, to document fights they hear neighbors having, give officers a statement, and show up in court so the victim is not alone in a potential he said, she said situation.

With October being Domestic Violence Awareness month, the Soroptimist are trying to bring awareness to the issue.

Leanne Wagoner, executive director of South Lake Tahoe Women's Center, is a member of the club. Her agency is partnering with Heavenly Village today for Shop to Stop Domestic Violence. Ten percent or more of proceeds from the 16 participating stores/eateries will be donated to the women's center.