

Angela Kuo and Genelle Taylor Kumpe: Turning abuse into a healthy lease on life

By Angela Kuo and Genelle Taylor
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Recent headlines -- and shocking online videos of physical assault -- have put domestic violence in the spotlight, drawing attention to the fact that at some point in their lives, one in four women and one in 10 men will be abused by someone they love.

Domestic violence is a health crisis that does not discriminate. It knows no boundaries. It affects women, men and children across every description of age, class, socio-economic or educational status, race or sexual orientation. It can range from physical violence, threats and sexual violence to emotional abuse, such as humiliation, intimidation and preventing contact with family and friends.

Victims' and families' overall health and well-being are affected. It is the leading cause of injuries in women ages 15-44 and a leading cause of injury-related deaths during pregnancy. Victims often have a wide range of physical and mental-health problems -- including depression, anxiety, headaches, abdominal pain and chronic pain.

The Marjaree Mason Center, a domestic violence agency that provides shelter and support services to domestic violence victims in Fresno County, also sees similar issues with children exposed to domestic violence.

Women affected by domestic violence often have poor control of health conditions such as asthma and diabetes. They are at higher risk for cardiovascular disease. Abused women have a 60% higher rate of neurological, gynecological and stress-related problems compared with women who have never been abused.

And they usually aren't able to take good care of themselves, often missing medical appointments or delaying treatment out of fear of exposing the abuse going on behind closed doors. Others can't get medical care because their abuser prevents them from seeking the help they need.

Kaiser Permanente Fresno is partnering with the Marjaree Mason Center in a Living Well Program in an effort to get these victims the resources they need and help get their lives back on track.

The center, in addition to offering support services, crisis intervention, counseling and shelter to victims and their children, aims to end the cycle of abuse through education and advocacy.

A \$47,000 grant from Kaiser Permanente Fresno supports exercise and nutrition classes for victims and also the staff who work at the Marjaree Mason Center. Other community organizations -- including The Bar Method, Blue Moon Yoga, Team Virtual Gym and Whole Foods -- are joining in this effort.

Victims who leave an abusive relationship often don't know how to take care of themselves properly and are overwhelmed by the stress they've endured. Physically, they may have injuries and health conditions that haven't healed or been properly treated. Emotionally, the damage may be much deeper. The classes and workshops are helping them heal completely: mind, body and spirit.

Kaiser Permanente Northern California region started its Family Violence Prevention Program in 1998 as a way to identify domestic violence victims, provide referrals and offer resources to help end abuse. The program is now embedded in every Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Northern California -- including Fresno.

Patients experiencing domestic violence are treated within the health-care system and referred to other resources in

the community, including the Marjaree Mason Center.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and a reminder that as a community, we can work together to end the cycle of abuse.

Taking away the stigma and talking about the issues are important first steps. Many of these victims live in silence, afraid to let others -- especially those closest to them -- know that someone they love is hurting them.

It is important to learn the signs and ways to prevent abuse. Domestic violence is a learned behavior and in order to break the cycle of abuse, it's critical to educate everyone about the lasting impact it has on victims and their children.

The bottom line is that abusive behavior in a relationship is never acceptable. Everyone deserves to be in a safe, healthy and loving relationship.

Most of the services offered at the Marjaree Mason Center are at no cost to clients because of the generous support offered by community organizations and volunteers. If you are interested in supporting one of the programs, such as the Living Well Program, contact the Marjaree Mason Center at (559) 237-4706.

For more information about domestic violence, please visit www.kp.org/domesticviolence, the Marjaree Mason Center website at www.mmcenter.org or call the 24-hour domestic violence hotline at 559-233-HELP (4357).

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