

Cycle of violence continues

A woman is beaten every 15 seconds in the U.S.



By Lindsey Erdody, Published: May 18, 2013
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Gypsy Reyes was not a stranger to domestic abuse.

Brian Reed, who is charged with murder in her beating death, had strangled, punched and bitten the 28-year-old before.

She had a domestic violence order of protection filed against Reed in October 2010 after he hurt her. It was set to be in effect for three years.

But they were allowed lawful contact. The two had a 3-year-old daughter, Jayla Reed.

When Reed, 41, showed up at Reyes' Frankfort apartment May 9, she told a friend she didn't need the police called. The next morning, police found her body bruised and swollen, allegedly from Reed beating her until she bled out in her brain.

Reyes isn't alone — not in being a domestic violence victim, not in trying to leave her abuser, not in being killed as a result of the abuse.

One in four women in the U.S. experiences domestic violence in her lifetime, and in almost one-third of female homicides, an intimate partner is responsible for the death.

In Frankfort, two other women in the last four years were killed from what appeared to be domestic violence.

Tomma Graves, 37, was shot to death July 31, 2010, by Alastair Couch. Bette Winn, 53, was beaten by Joe Gregory Wilson Oct. 17, 2009, and died the following day as a result of her head injuries.

County Attorney Rick Sparks calls domestic violence an "equal opportunity killer" — it can affect anyone regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or social class.

Victims can rarely predict that their loved one will beat them, and many struggle to leave because they're depleted from the verbal and physical abuse.

Many cases — especially when a man is the victim — are never reported to the police, and when a

case is reported, law enforcement and the court system often struggle to assist victims as they change their stories or refuse to testify against their abusers.

The problem is minimized, and the cycle of violence continues: A woman is beaten every 15 seconds in the United States.

A lucky one

Samuella Daum never saw it coming.

She was a friend of her abuser before they started a relationship, and there were no signs of violence.

But within the first year of their relationship, she was abused.

“I would have never imagined in a million years,” Daum said.

She was strangled, pinned to a concrete floor, pushed and shoved into furniture, threatened, had things thrown at her and had her belongings destroyed.

“I came home one time and it looked like my house had been robbed, and that was after I got beat up the night before.” Daum said. “You name it, I’ve probably just about gone through it.”

She experienced this for 14 years before her abuser started becoming interested in someone else. That small distraction was the opportunity she needed to leave.

“Because they were looking this way, I was able to go out the back door,” Daum said. “I think, in a way, I’m one of the lucky ones.”

Unsuspecting victims

It’s the case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Victims fall in love with the charming Dr. Jekyll only to later be beaten by the sinister Mr. Hyde.

Daum, now the executive director of the Franklin County Council on Family Abuse, said abusers seek out areas they can appeal to with the victim to gain power.

“Abuse is all about gaining and maintaining control,” Daum said. “They lure you in like a trap.”

Abusers groom their victims, and the relationships start just like any other.

“Your average individual just doesn’t know the difference,” Daum said. “The victim ... they don’t see any of this coming ... The next thing you know, you’re pulled in.”

Once a victim is attached to his or her abuser, the abuser has control in the relationship, and the cycle begins.

It starts with the tension slowly building — victims feel like they have to walk on eggshells, there’s poor communication and the abuser becomes angrier than usual.

Then, the abuser loses control. In the crisis phase, the victim may be emotionally, physically and sexually abused, blamed for everything and feel trapped and helpless.

Eventually, the beatings stop. The abuser feels bad and will do anything to please the victim — apologize, promise to change and vow that it will never happen again. The victim is convinced to stay.

In the calm phase, there's no abuse, and victims feel like their significant other has changed.

The cycle can take hours, weeks, months or even years.

Daum said the cycles in her abusive relationship lasted about three to four months before starting all over again.

Escaping violence

It's not that victims won't leave their abusers. It's that they can't.

They are not physically, mentally or emotionally strong enough to walk away, Daum said.

“It's always what's wrong with her as to why she's not leaving,” Daum said.

“More correctly stated, it's that the mental and emotional tools victims need in order to leave have been gradually depleted and completely replaced with a set of mental and emotional beliefs that they cannot leave.”

Daum explained that abusers are easily threatened because their inadequacies, insecurities, helplessness and fear are at a high level. She said they're actually more afraid than the victims are.

“An abuser's way of coping with this is they project it onto someone else,” Daum said.

The victim becomes a depository for the abuser's feelings. When a victim rallies the power to leave an abuser, all he or she wants is to never deal with that person again.

“By that point, you are so thankful you are through with them,” Daum said.

Getting to court

Sparks deals with a lot of victims who refuse to testify against their abusers, which makes prosecuting cases difficult.

“It's a real problem we've dealt with across the state,” Sparks said. “You just have to work with them and try to keep them safe.”

Domestic violence charges are usually prosecuted as fourth-degree assault (domestic violence) — a misdemeanor — unless there are serious and severe injuries or a deadly weapon is used. In those cases, the assault charge could be tried as a felony offense.

The charge for fourth-degree assault carries a maximum penalty of 12 months in jail and a \$500 fine.

However, a victim receives protection for a longer period if the maximum sentence isn't imposed.

Defendants can be sentenced to two years probation and have a domestic violence order enforced for three years. Defendants can also be ordered to wear an ankle-monitoring device or serve some jail time and then shock probation.

"The goal isn't punishment. It's protection," Sparks said.

If someone is convicted of three fourth-degree assault (domestic violence) charges within five years, regardless of who the victim is, the charge becomes a felony with higher consequences.

Victims can also pursue civil cases to obtain a domestic violence protection order, which carries a variety of regulations depending on the circumstances and what the victim wants.

"You can get a DVO to prevent that assault from ever happening," Spark said. "The idea is to separate the parties to make sure it never happens again."

Plenty of victims change their stories after telling police they were beaten or refuse to testify in court.

Sparks said it's frustrating, but he keeps trying.

"They don't have to take this ... there's things we can do to help. But ultimately they have to say 'I'm done,' and it takes a lot for someone to say they're done," Sparks said. "The worst thing people can do is stay silent."

He said he will let cases pass in court for six months to give victims more time to realize they need to testify. Or he'll subpoena victims so they realize he's serious about prosecuting the case.

"I try to work with the victim as much as I can to let him or her know there are options," Sparks said. "You can throw them a lifeline, but sometimes they gotta swim to it."

When protection doesn't work

Reyes had a DVO against Reed, but they were allowed to have lawful contact, so being at her apartment wasn't a violation.

When he allegedly beat her to death, he violated the order.

The protective order did not prevent her death.

Reed had been charged with fourth-degree assault (domestic violence) several times in the past, but the cases didn't fall within the timeframe to charge him with a felony. His third charge was about nine months after the 5-year mark.

Daum said there's a tendency in society to minimize domestic violence as something that's not serious if someone hasn't been significantly injured.

"But victims get it," Daum said. "They know what's intended to come next."

She said the penalties for domestic violence should be stricter because abusers can repeat their actions.

“It would be good if we could change that (penalty) here,” Daum said.

She said because victims are struggling to get from one situation to the next, they rely on others to get involved and help, but that doesn’t happen often.

“There’s a lot of people who do care, but clearly it’s limited,” Daum said. “There still shouldn’t be such a back seat approach.”

Even in the short time span since Reyes died, more people have been hurt.

“This is going on,” Daum said. “Somebody has already gotten beat up in this town.”

IN FOUR YEARS, THREE WOMEN KILLED IN FRANKFORT

GYPSY REYES

Age: 28

Died: May 10, 2013

Brian Reed, 41, allegedly beat Reyes until she suffered from an acute subdural hematoma, meaning she bled out in her brain. Reyes had a domestic violence order against Reed from when he abused her in 2010.

They had a 3-year-old daughter, Jayla Reed.

Reed is charged with murder and is awaiting trial. He faces the death penalty because of the additional charge of violating the DVO.

TOMMA GRAVES

Age: 37

Died: July 31, 2010

Alastair Couch shot Graves — a victim’s advocate in domestic violence cases for the Franklin County Attorney’s Office — multiple times and left her body in a truck. It’s believed they had an off-and-on relationship.

Couch was found guilty of murder, tampering with evidence and being a persistent felon. He was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

He is eligible for parole in August 2030.

BETTE WINN

Age: 53

Died: Oct. 18, 2009

Joe Gregory Wilson, who was separated from Winn but living with her at the time, beat her while she slept. She died the next day from her head injuries.

In July 2010, a grand jury indicted Wilson for first-degree manslaughter in Winn's death.

He pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter on the first day of his trial in February 2012. He was sentenced to 60 days in jail and then received probation.

Daum's advice to victims:

- > It's not your fault
- > It's never too late to leave
- > There's no way to leave and not be afraid, but leaving will give you better odds for a healthier and safer future
- > There's someone who can help you
- > Gather your things, make a phone call, walk out the door with your fear and hurt later

IF YOU NEED HELP

Franklin County Council on Family Abuse provides temporary housing to domestic violence victims in its safe house. In 2012, the council provided 735 safe nights for 65 men, women and children.

24-7 hotline: 502-229-9762

Case worker: 502-229-7027

Council phone: 502-229-6116