

Statistics are fact, not fiction

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STAMPING OUT VIOLENCE: Tamworth Family Support and Women's Refuge Workers, Charmane Holm, left, Natalie Ryan and Mim Currell, want women to know that there is help available. Photo: Geoff O'Neill 210214GOB01

ONE in four Tamworth women experience domestic violence. It might sound like a frightening statistic but it is fact according to those on the frontline. That's one in four women in the office, one in four women on the sideline of a children's soccer match or one in four women at the local coffee shop.

Domestic violence has largely been in the news for all the wrong reasons in recent weeks after a string of violent murders and high-profile cases. Sydney man Simon Gittany will spend up to 26 years behind bars for terrorising his girlfriend before throwing her off their high-rise balcony.

Another case which has rocked the country is the brutal killing of a young boy by his father at a cricket field at Tyabb near Melbourne. His mother spoke out to help other women, and let them know that family violence is unacceptable. But experts say the only way to overcome the violence is by way of a two-pronged attack – education and awareness.

Sixty-six per cent of all women who have accessed the Tamworth Women's Refuge are domestic violence victims. Tamworth Family Support team leader Charmane Holm said the rates of violence were on the rise locally. "Since about 12 months ago there has been a huge increase in domestic violence," Ms Holm told The Leader. From our experience

here at the refuge the violence is getting more severe.” Ms Holm said in just the past seven months the refuge has seen 33 children come through the doors with their mothers. The service primarily supports women and children who they said are the main victims, but that is likely to change down the track. Domestic violence isn’t just necessarily physical attacks – it can be sexual, financial, verbal or even psychological abuse. “We’re noticing many more physical assaults coming through than the verbal assaults,” support caseworker Nicole Stubbs said. “We’re seeing more traumatisation, more anxiety, more depression, more mental health ... that could be the victim themselves, or the environment they were in.”

And family violence is a major element in the mix. Children are often the silent victims of domestic violence but while there is a dedicated caseworker in Tamworth there is a lack of widespread kids- only services available. The local increase has been blamed on high unemployment, a lack of affordable housing and increasing drug and alcohol issues. But the frontline workers want local women to know that they are not alone. “No matter what they have been told by their partner, abuse is not their fault,” Ms Stubbs said.

Local refuge is here to help

THE Women’s Refuge is the only one of its kind covering Tamworth and surrounding areas and it only has accommodation available for five families. “We never turn a woman and children away of course, we work closely with them to find alternatives,” Ms Holm said. And there are options available through outreach programs, through the Department of Housing, Homes North and others.

The support service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week – like domestic violence, it doesn’t stop. On caseworkers’ wish lists would be more funding to tackle the rise of domestic violence, which gets worse each year. One thing they are adamant about is that it doesn’t discriminate in age, race, culture or society. People believe what happens behind closed doors stays there,” Ms Stubbs said. “There is the fear of the repercussions of reporting and the fear of not being believed.”

And the statistics are not a true indication of the widespread problem – experts say it’s very much under-reported. “Intimidation and the fear, to be able to physically come forward and report these instances, sometimes is not an option,” Ms Holm said. If you need help or you know someone who does you can access the Domestic Violence Hotline on 1800 656 463 or the Tamworth Family Support Service (24 hours) on 1800 07 33 88.