

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

The message is loud and clear: Jewish victims of domestic abuse need our support

by [Bee Schindler, Chronicle Correspondent](#)

11.05.14 - 08:05 pm

Domestic abuse is a Jewish issue, say some of the most influential organizations in the city, and they're not afraid to highlight what the Jewish community can do to prevent it.

An Oct. 29 event at the JCC brought together a roundtable of rabbis, executive directors and community leaders throughout the city to discuss Jewish perspectives related to domestic abuse in the community. Operating under the banner of the Jewish Domestic Abuse Awareness Coalition — member groups include Jewish Family & Children's Service, the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh and the National Council of Jewish Women Pittsburgh Section — they stressed that any impression that domestic abuse is some other community's problem is misinformed.

"Jewish victims have the same concerns as non-Jewish victims of domestic violence — they want to be safe and protected in their relationships and in their homes," said Ilene Rinn, a senior allocations and planning manager at the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh.

According to statistics provided by the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, gender-based violence "occurs in Jewish families at about the same rate as in the general community — about 15 percent — and the abuse takes place among all branches of Judaism and at all socioeconomic levels."

However, there are particular cultural concerns relating to domestic violence in Jewish relationships, such as the concept of shalom bayit, which puts a premium on maintaining peace in the home. Some women, the coalition maintained, may not tell anyone of suffering abuse because they don't want to shatter the implied peacefulness of their Jewish home.

But "peaceful and harmonious domestic relations isn't just one person's responsibility," stressed Rinn. "Both partners in a relationship are responsible to keep the peace, which includes mutual respect, patience, cooperation and understanding."

The coalition also pointed out that the desire to keep Shabbat, to be close to their children's school and to be able to find kosher food at a domestic violence shelter also prevents many victims from talking about their abuse. With this in mind, the Women's Center and Shelter, for example, aims to provide for such needs when dealing with Chasidic families who experience domestic violence.

"In the past, [the Women's Center and Shelter] has consulted with leaders in various religious communities to understand how to meet particular needs," said Shirl Regan, executive director of the center. "The agency has supported Jewish women who keep kosher by providing kosher food and making changes to supplies used in the kitchen, including providing separate dishes and utensils that meet kosher standards.

"The staff at the Women's Center and Shelter are very sensitive to the individual cultural needs of the women we serve, and we are very open to accommodating individuals with specific requirements," she added.

While the center is just one safe space, the community as a whole can work together to shed light on domestic abuse, said Brian Schreiber, president and CEO of the Jewish Community Center.

“There are many ways for the community to work together as parents, coaches, employers, community leaders or clergy,” said Schreiber. “We can model healthy, equitable relationships. ... Together we can interrupt other men’s violence and teach boys about healthy masculinity.”

Last month, the JCC unveiled nearly 1,000 signatures of men vowing to end the cycle of violence by standing up against abuse and speaking up when they hear of it in their communities.

“We at the JCC have an opportunity to take the message of ending gender violence to our board, our staff, our families, our coaches and counselors as well as to the public at large,” Schreiber said. “We must continue to teach and broaden the message.”

“Signing the pledge is not enough,” he emphasized. “Close to 30,000 individuals pass through our doors each year; we will continue to educate and message to keep this issue alive.”

Bee Schindler can be reached at beeschindler@gmail.com.

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