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## Social Work Faculty Offers Insights on Domestic Violence Awareness

Understanding warning signs and ways to help are critical to helping combat problem

OCTOBER 26, 2018 BY SARA WHITE AND SARAH SAPP



Social work professor Desiree Stepteau-Watson says that information is one of the most important tools for combatting domestic violence. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time to share information and resources about an issue that affects millions of people every year.

At the forefront of domestic violence are social workers who say it is one of the most common issues they come across. Faculty members in the University of Mississippi **Department of Social Work** are doing their part to educate the community and state about the issue.

“The best resource to offer is information about where and how to seek help,” said Desiree Stepteau-Watson, Bachelor of Social Work program director and associate professor of social work. “It is also important to convey the message that victims will be supported, believed and heard.”

Domestic violence can be anything from physical violence, sexual assault, intimidation, threats of violence and/or psychological abuse.

Among the signs that a person may be a victim of domestic violence are unexplained injuries, being concerned about disobeying their partner, being in constant contact, having to check in with their partner, injuries at various stages of healing, and cutting off relationships with family members and friends, Stepteau-Watson said.

Women between the ages of 18 and 24 are at the greatest risk of experiencing of domestic violence, but it can affect anyone, regardless of economic or educational level, race, religion, age group (including the elderly) or sexual orientation, Stepteau-Watson said.

This type of behavior in relationships can be learned at a young age, as children who grow up witnessing or experiencing violence at home may believe that it is a normal way to resolve conflict. Drug and alcohol use may contribute to the violence, but do not necessarily cause it to occur.

“Common myths about domestic violence include perceptions that it is easy to leave violent situations,” Stepteau-Watson said. “Some people think if the abuse was that bad, then the victim should just leave, and if she or he doesn’t leave, that must mean they like it.

“In fact, it can be extremely dangerous to leave an abusive partner. The abuse may escalate and become more dangerous if the victim attempts to leave. Leaving may put family members, children and friends at risk of harm.”

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OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation’s capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

Stepteau-Watson encourages anyone who suspects that a loved one is experiencing domestic violence to put their safety first by finding a safe place to talk, then focusing on what they want to do, not what they should do.

"Be sure to let them know that you want to be of support," Stepteau-Watson said. "It is also important to document what you observe, keep a record of what you see and hear. Such a record could be a useful piece of evidence in the future.

"Learn more about domestic violence and get information from local domestic violence agencies."

On a local level, victims can rely on the [Family Crisis Services of Northwest Mississippi](#) for resources.

In 2017, 185 domestic violence arrests were recorded in Lafayette County through the Oxford Police Department, University Police Department and the Sheriff's Department, said Mary-Margaret Chaffe, domestic violence advocate and program assistant at Family Crisis Services.

"That averages about 15.4 a month," Chaffe said. "The scarier part is the number of ones that go unreported.

"Family Crisis Services is here to support and believe our victims, survivors and families. Our mission is to reduce the trauma of violence by providing immediate and long-term support to survivors."

The organization provides victim advocacy, on-site counseling, resources, referrals, hospital accompaniment and court accompaniment services. It also operates a 24-hour crisis hotline, 800-230-9929.

"We are here for the victims and their families throughout their healing process," she said. "Having the community involved in the awareness campaigns that we do means everything to the families we represent. We need to stand up against domestic violence as a community because no one should suffer in silence."

Besides local groups, statewide agencies such as the [Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) can offer help. On campus, students can get help from the UM [SAFE website](#) or the [Counseling Center](#).

The Master of Social Work program trains students to work with victims of domestic violence in mental health settings, courtrooms, hospitals, schools, family counseling and child protective services, Stepteau-Watson said.

"Our Master of Social Work program prepares graduates with the clinical assessment and intervention skills to address domestic violence with individuals, families and in communities," she said. "The macro-level training that our MSW program provides, enables graduates to work on policy initiatives on local, state and national levels."

For more information about becoming a social worker, contact the Department of Social Work at 662-915-7336 or email [socialwork@olemiss.edu](mailto:socialwork@olemiss.edu).

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