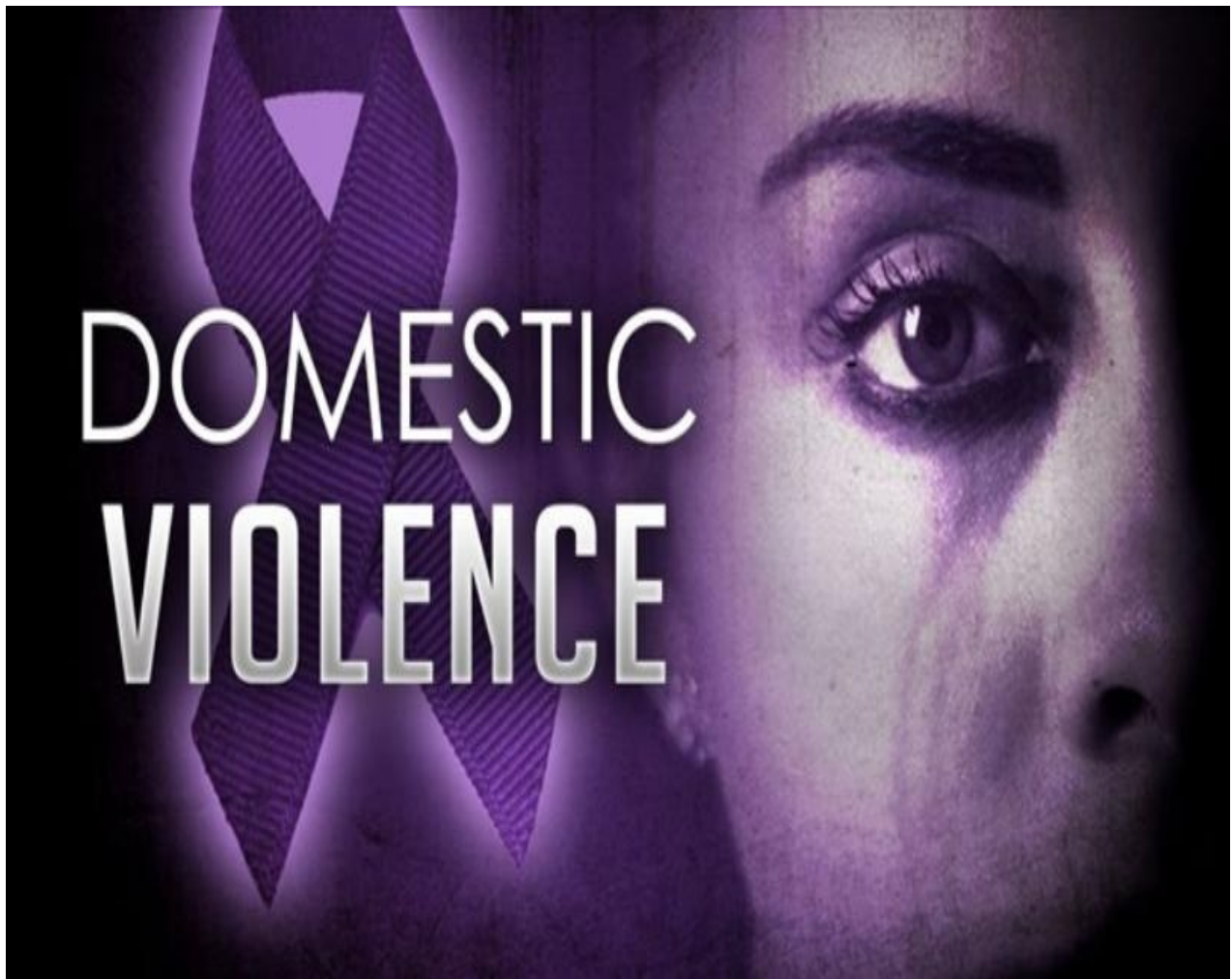


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Opinion | Domestic Violence Should Not Only be Remembered in October

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The Caribbean regions have attracted worldwide attention for some of the highest-profile cases of gendered- based, and domestic violence (Guy-Cupid, 2016). According to the Virgin Islands and Sexual Assault Council (DVISAC), Domestic violence (DV) is the deliberate terrorization of physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner. Further research on the impact of domestic violence, DVISAC claims it is an epidemic affecting everyone in every community, regardless of age, financial status, race, religion, nationality, or educational background. There is growing evidence that violence in the family becomes the breeding ground for other social problems. Problems such as substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, and violent crimes of all types (Ganley, 2002).

Gender-based violence or violence against women and men (GBV/ VAWM) touches all people globally. Specifically, women and girls, and the world have suffered from its demoralizing impact. In 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women offered the first official definition of the term as an act of violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women (King, 2019). GBV also includes threats of coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (II.C.13 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993). This type of violence reinforces inequalities between genders and the abuse of power. Although men and boys are equally affected, unfortunately, in some cases, women and girls are the ones who suffer most (Ellsberg et al., 2015).

Domestic violence offers an operative phrase, intimate partner violence- means that the victim has close relations with the perpetrator. These relationships take the forms of crimes of passion, child abuse by a parent or close relative, and elderly abuse, to include the disabled. Perpetrators are often those who are in positions of power. Those victimized have been manipulated, exploited, and poorly treated. Their dependence on a system continues to fail them as it has failed them for centuries. According to studies, violence against the most vulnerable is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world (Guy-Cupid, 2016).

October is DV awareness month, and it is fitting to acknowledge those who have lost their loved ones as a result of the atrocities. The public ought to be well aware that October is not the only time for awareness; we should never forget those who have suffered. As a community, an Island, a nation, and members of the world, both men and women must echo the sentiment and cry RAPE: Report, Advocate, Protect, and Educate!

A nation divided against itself is a nation of doom. Progress is the eradication of the problem of domestic and sexual violence (Guy-Cupid, 2018). The USVI must speak against those who insist on perpetuating a society and structure that benefits only themselves. Actively and aggressively calling for changes in laws and policies, and the creation of other acts will change the current legislation. In 1994, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges published a Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence. According to the model, as mentioned above, States and Territories should adopt the code to meet their specific needs. "Family violence is a wrong that needs righting in every state in this country. The key is community commitment to recognize, address, and prevent such violence. Effective and enabling legislation is the cornerstone of change." (Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence, 1994)

Bystanders can no longer turn a blind eye to this problem that the world now sees. Systems must be in place, collectively, and diligently working to protect those who are most vulnerable. Ad hoc committees, with task force focusing on the problem, liaison between governmental and religious sectors to include law enforcement, public health, and hospital administrators. The departments of education should join forces with teachers, professors, and others to focus on the specific trepidations that plague the USVI concerning domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of violence. In most recent news, we have seen when ignoring how devastating and detrimental careless can be. I am tired of infants dying, and women found dead in allies, sexual and human trafficking goes unnoticed in these paradise islands. I give credit to the organizations and

those working behind the scenes for their efforts using whatever little they have within a broken system to rectify and save innocent lives. However, the government needs to do more.

Definitions and policies are pronounced, but when not legislated to enforce (the letter of the law), they are useless. Systems that refuse to work together offer no provision to train and educate efficiently are invalid. How long can we sit and watched in this killing silence? Our silence audibly makes a statement of consent. To look away with an ostrich syndrome in denial is to do nothing. The path to least resistance, the easiest or least stressful course of action is no longer an option. The governing law and treaties such as the Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence and others should not be the only resort. To adequately address domestic and sexual violence for ALL, the government must develop a strategic plan that offers implementations, evaluations, and seeking out best practices to combat the issues.

In honor of those whose lives were cut short, agree with me, to join in speaking out, in advocating, and promoting changes for those who are no longer with us or who remain silent - suppressed and oppressed. Women and men, boys and girls, agree with me and Cry RAPE: Report, Advocate, Protect, and Educate... break the silence (Guy-Cupid, 2018)).

Submitted on Tuesday by Gail-Ann Guy-Cupid, an assistant professor at the University of the Virgin Islands.

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