

Cortney Fisher, J.D., Ph.D., the current interim executive director of the Jewish Coalition against Domestic Abuse (JCADA), spoke about power-based violence at the Lake Barcroft Village quarterly meeting, November 13, 2018. The title of her talk was “What You Didn't Know You Didn't Know About Power-Based Violence.”

Dr. Fisher noted that the threefold mission of JCADA is to 1) support victims of domestic abuse; 2) educate the community including clergy and professionals; 3) prevent future generations from suffering domestic abuse. JCADA is committed to “providing high-quality services to all residents of the Greater Washington DC community without regard to race, national origin, ability, background, faith, gender or sexual orientation.” Their Fairfax office is in the historic courthouse and their phone number is 1 877 88JCADA (52232).

Dr. Fisher provided the following definitions: Power-Based Abuse is when one person uses their social, political, intimate, physical, or financial power to maintain control of another person; Power-Based Violence is when violence is used to maintain that power. Some of the sources of power are: children and family, spirituality and faith, finances, social networks and isolation.

Generally the abuse does not start with violence, but rather demeaning someone or calling names. The abuser knows that “people will do almost anything to maintain the family,” Dr. Fisher said. Elder abuse can come from a child, grandchild, or any relative. Often the older person is afraid to talk to the police because it will “disrupt the family structure.” An example of spirituality-based abuse of power is to tell someone “you are going to hell.” Outsiders often wonder why the abused person stays in the relationship. Some of the reasons are: children, finances, friends, lack of self-esteem, not having a place to go.

Another crime that Dr. Fisher covered was stalking. In the case of a stalker, the individual acts (such as gifts, phone calls, texts) are not crimes in themselves, but “taken together they cause a reasonable person to feel fear.” Dr. Fisher emphasized that stalking is often “a predictor of lethality.”

After the abuse, Dr. Fisher explained there was generally a “honeymoon phase.” The pattern is a buildup of tension, the incident, and then the honeymoon. As the relationship continues “the incidents become more frequent and more serious.” The perpetrator is rational and is “thinking things through.” The victim becomes more erratic in his or her behavior. Warning signs are: “behaving as if one’s life is threatened,” mood swings, a reluctance to leave home. If the victim has a pet, he or she often fears the abuser will hurt the pet.

In terms of what friends, family and neighbors can do, Dr. Fisher said to remind the victim that what happened is not their fault. One can try to connect them to resources that can help and one should “focus on what their strengths are.” JCADA staff will never tell a person to leave the abuser, but will try to help with a safety plan. Dr. Fisher cautioned that telling the victim to leave the abuser indicates that you are no longer a “safe place” to go for the victim.