

Fostering Social Change

BY KALENE MCCORT



photo by Tom Kimmell

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It is one of those crimes that occurs behind closed doors, by one you consider a loved partner. Leaving a trail of confusion and emotional and physical scars, domestic violence rears its ugly head in households across the US regardless of race or economic status. UCCS associate professor in the School of Public Affairs Catherine Kaukinen is fighting to break this cycle by providing women with the tools they need to learn how to live a violent-free life.

Originally a biology major, Kaukinen put herself through college by doing road construction and waiting tables. In graduate school, she decided to take on a combined second major of sociology and criminology in order to catapult a potential career in law. Once submerged in those subjects, she realized she had found her true calling.

"I loved the research process and studying human behavior," said Kaukinen who earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Toronto. "It is much more difficult to study human behavior and the effects of events on humans than to do hard science. But, I find it very rewarding."

A true go-getter, she credits her intrepid attitude with her success within her field.

"Don't complain unless you are going to get off your butt and do something about what you are complaining about," said Kaukinen. "When something needs to be done I usually am the first to volunteer to do it."

Assuming responsibility comes naturally for Kaukinen who as a teen, in a two parent working household, played a major role in keeping the house and her siblings in check. Now, she remains committed to the role family structure plays in regards to in-house violence and child development

Kaukinen was awarded a federally funded grant of \$446,542 by the US Department of Justice, for her work: "Impact of Proactive Enforcement of No-Contact Orders on Victim Safety and Repeat Victimization."

According to Kaukinen, "This project aimed to see whether intensive enforcement of criminal orders and providing women with information and knowledge about their legal status during a criminal justice investigation and prosecution for domestic violence, reduced offenders' use of violence and improved women's safety."

While the research showed little change in men's behavior, it found that female victims were more likely to view their abuser as a violent criminal.

"I think the penalties need to be swift and better address the issues that couples face in a violent relationship," said Kaukinen. "Fines are often paid by the victim or she is impacted by a fine since there is therefore less money for the family. The same is true for jail if the batterer loses his job and cannot pay their bills."

Kaukinen expresses that while domestic violence has declined since the 1990s due to more help services available to women along with their access to education and financial autonomy, much more has to be offered to prevent future physical disputes.

"We need interventions that address issues of anger, substance abuse and other criminality," said Kaukinen. "There

should also be greater access to services for women such as health, temporary welfare, housing, education, employment and emergency protection orders."

"I don't really think it is for me or anyone else to say that a victim should leave her partner, rather we need to provide resources so she can leave if that is what is safest for her and her children."

Kaukinen has plans to devote more of her research to the violent nature that surrounds teenage relationships, hoping to discover why we have seen a rise in this over the years.

"I love to challenge people's beliefs about human behavior and in particular what people think of as common knowledge which actually is something that needs to be studied and identified," Kaukinen said.

She believes a key to decreasing acts of domestic violence starts with raising children that are not hostile.



"Since we still have domestic violence we are doing something wrong," said Kaukinen. "I think we really need to move to primary prevention and deal with early violence and aggression in children. Waiting for the domestic violence to occur is really problematic. We need to address dating violence among young people and deal with other violence and aggression."

Currently, Kaukinen is working on developing a campus-wide intervention and prevention program to address interpersonal violence among UCCS students. Hoping to resolve conflict and strengthen communication right in the place her research thrives.

Savoring the interactions between students that are engaged, she advises those who wish to break into the field of criminal justice to have patience in regards to their progress with the people whose lives they strive to improve.

"This is a very difficult area where progress is sometimes measured in inches and not feet. When you work within the area of domestic

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violence you cannot expect that a woman's life will change overnight. If you work with offenders you cannot expect that they will change their behavior and want to lead a conventional life just because they are offered the opportunity. Change can take a long time; a person's life took a long time to get the way it is, and will take a lot of time and action to change."

"I particularly like the fact that human behavior is not stable over an individual's life course or over generations," she said. "This is particularly true with respect to the causes and consequences of violence and victimization."

In addition to doing research in the realm of domestic violence, Kaukinen has devoted her time to exploring the location of HIV-services across Toronto neighborhoods and she is the principal investigator in "Contemporary Issues in Social and Public Policy: An American/Canadian Comparison."

When not finding out solutions to best foster positive social change within the world, Kaukinen enjoys hiking with her beloved canines named after Hollywood divas Audrey Hepburn and Sandra Bernhard. She is also an avid NASCAR fan and looking at her scope of work it comes as no surprise she relishes in watching a determined racer make it to the finish line.

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