

MERCED SUN-STAR

Our View: There is hope amid the violence

Three programs — from large scale to small — seek solutions to domestic violence, mental health issues.

Like most Mercedians, we were horrified at last week's murder-suicide in South Merced, which wound up in Fresno. Police say a 23-year-old woman was shot several times and killed by a 22-year-old man with whom she had two children. Neighbors said they'd "break up and get back together." He shot her here and fled to Fresno, where he shot himself.

This week a new report from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research sheds light on the ripple effects of what their researchers call "intimate partner violence." Victims who suffer violence at the hands of a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or other intimate partner, aren't only brutalized physically; they also suffer disproportionately higher rates of mental health distress, according to a new policy brief from the center. Its report said 3.5 million Californians — almost 10 percent of the state's population — reported having been the victim of intimate partner violence in 2009.

That's the bad news.

The good news for Mercedians is that in the past week the Sun-Star has reported three encouraging local solutions or strategies that address the issue. Yesenia Amaro wrote about the new Merced County Mental Health Services Act Innovation Plan "Strengthening Families" project. The \$1.9 million project, which lasts three years, will operate in Planada, Le Grand, El Nido, Dos Palos and South Dos Palos.

In brief, it offers mental health services to needy people who might have trouble getting to those services otherwise.

Yesenia also wrote about Mary's Mantle, a nonprofit that offers shelter for any pregnant woman 18 and older who wants to keep her baby. Women can join the program at any time during their pregnancy and stay at the home for up to six months or longer after their baby is born. Its location is secret so those it helps don't have to deal with fear of intimate partner violence as well as a new infant.

Finally, Victor Patton profiled Tunde Osungboye, a 23-year-old AmeriCorps volunteer, who serves as a youth mentor, neighborhood activist and local all-around good guy at the Merced Meadows Apartments, a low-income complex in a place considered by many to be one of the city's most dangerous. There he spends about five to six hours a day doing his community work, which ranges from helping children — usually ages 3 to 13 — with their homework to playing baseball, basketball, soccer and jump-rope to keep them occupied after school.

So right here in our country we can claim three innovative approaches to dealing with domestic violence and its equally violent after-shocks: one is institutional (the county program); one is nonprofit (Mary's Mantle); and one is an individual (Tunde).

These multi-pronged efforts should be recognized, encouraged and supported. We applaud the people in all three causes who are working to solve or at least lessen the impact of one of the most serious problems our county faces.