

## Good news, bad news in the war against domestic violence

BY GREG STEWART  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

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There is a disproportionately large and vastly underestimated impact of domestic violence on public safety.

Just how widespread is the impact of domestic violence? First, the bad news: In 2001 domestic violence accounted 48 percent, nearly half, of all reported assaults in the city of Portland. Think about that. In 2001, if you were assaulted in this city there were basically equal odds that a family member or intimate partner was responsible. Even in the most serious assaults, termed aggravated assaults, 34 percent were related to domestic violence. Homicides? In most years about a quarter of all homicides are related to domestic violence.

Again, in terms of serious violence, really only gang violence can compare with domestic violence and even then, domestic violence is more prevalent in total numbers. Furthermore, if one examines the criminal history of gang members it quickly becomes apparent that the distinction between gang and domestic violence is spurious. Not surprisingly, gang violence intersects with domestic violence. In an analysis of the domestic violence offenders in Portland, nearly 32 percent had a history of gang involvement. Individuals with a history of

gang involvement number are less than 0.5 percent of the population of Portland but account for about 4.5 percent of all reported domestic violence, and as mentioned above are even more misrepresented as repeat offenders. Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, violence begins at home.

Through a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication by community groups, advocates, members of the city and county councils and the criminal justice system we have made some headway.

The number of assaults related to domestic violence has shrunk from over 3,600 assaults in 2001 to 2,500 in 2011, a nearly 30 percent drop. Though that still means there are about seven domestic assaults a day reported in the City of Portland — and probably many more unreported. As a proportion of assaults, domestic violence has fallen from 48 percent of assaults to 42 percent, meaning that we have been able to reduce the number of domestic violence assaults faster than other assaults. This is the “good news.”

But let's think about that. The “good news” is that in 2011, only 42 percent of assaults are related to domestic violence. I suspect the citizens of Portland would find that number unacceptable.

And even these numbers underestimate

the scope of this issue. These numbers are “reported crime.” Guess what, most domestic crime is not reported. The numbers captured are a small portion of the overall problem.

Like most violent crime the number of domestic violence assaults has fallen dramatically over the last 10 years.

Unfortunately that trend may be at an end. As of April 15, domestic violence crime is up nearly 6 percent citywide, aggravated assaults are up an astonishing 36 percent. The State of Oregon has had 25 fatalities (homicides and/or homicide-suicides) so far in 2012. This includes several incidents where the homicides occurred with children present in the home at the time of homicide and, tragically, an incident in which a husband killed his wife and their three children.

While good work has been done, clearly there is still a long way to go — both to keep the gains we have made and continue to reduce the impact of domestic violence. Part of this process is making the public aware of the impact of domestic violence.

**As of April 15, domestic violence crime is up nearly 6 percent citywide, aggravated assaults are up an astonishing 36 percent.**

### Rain of Tears

By Leo Rhodes

The rain comes down each day worse than the day before  
I try to prevent my clothes from getting wet.  
Right now they're damp  
A breeze comes  
Sending a cold, damp chill  
Right to my bones  
How I wish for dry clothes  
And a nice, safe, dry, warm place.

Now I have a place, were I'm safe, warm and dry  
I try to get the awful memories out of my head  
Eating my dinner and watching television.  
With my shutters closed  
I try to ignore the constant tapping on my window  
As the wind and rain rage outside  
Opening the shutters I see the tree outside my window  
With its glissading contours  
Amplified by the rain and the streetlights close by.  
The tree seems to be waving at me  
As the wind blows through its limbs.  
Then I notice the big raindrops coming down all around outside.  
Some of the raindrops hit my window  
I watch as they slowly trickle down the length of the window

Reminding me of the many tear drops  
I shared with my brothers and sisters on the streets.

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