

UW helps men with abuse issues

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The recent arrest of Seattle Mariners pitcher Julio Mateo on a third-degree assault charge involving his wife has put domestic violence in the headlines again.

But this is no isolated incident. A 2003 survey by Group Health in Seattle found that 44 percent of female respondents had been physically abused or subjected to emotional abuse from domestic partners.

This is why men prone to or involved in domestic violence need to know that “help is just a phone call away” with a new service at the University of Washington.

Why would a man in this situation seek such help? Making that call can be intimidating. On one hand, it’s likely that he feels badly about what he has been doing. He might even have seen his dad act that way toward his mom, and can painfully remember how frightening that was.

But he might believe that he’s justified in how he acts, and that his wife or partner is the one who needs to change.

The fact that some are ambivalent about partner abuse isn’t surprising. Often there are two sides to a story.

There’s some good news. Many men who have had mixed feelings about how they’ve acted at home have found a better and more effective way of improving their relationships.

The Men’s Domestic Abuse Check-Up at the UW can be a first step in that direction.

It’s not a treatment program. Instead, it’s a chance to think through what’s been happening at home with a counselor who’s respectful and nonjudgmental. It’s a chance to take stock of the situation and think through one’s options.

It’s brief – just two sessions – it’s free, and men who participate can even remain anonymous. And it’s all done by phone.

Men who are eligible are compensated for helping the UW researchers in evaluating this innovative program.

This UW study is designed for men who are concerned about their behaviors with their wives or partners, believe that they might have been abusive, and want the chance to talk about it.

In nine months since the project began, more than 200 men have called the project's toll-free number (1-800-MEN-1089) to learn more.

One man who called the Men's Domestic Abuse Check-Up line thanked the staff for being respectful. He said, "The questions you asked brought home to me the impact of my behavior on my family far more powerfully than would a lecture."

Roger Roffman is a professor of social work at the University of Washington. The Men's Domestic Abuse Check-Up's Web site is www.menscheckup.org.

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