

Judge guilty of blaming the abused

To the editor:

In the sad case of Bonnie Ray Harper, Judge Willmore posed a difficult question, "When is domestic violence going to stop?" Unfortunately the "message to society" he sent is indicative of the myths, stereotypes and bias that allow domestic violence to continue; namely, blame the abused and hold them accountable for the behavior of the abuser, rather than holding the abuser accountable.

His statements reveal ignorance about the causes and effects of domestic violence and perpetuate misguided blame.

"I can't comprehend why a mother would let her children go through that for so long," he was quoted in the article published in The Herald Journal on Dec. 5. Should not the question we ask be: Why would a husband do that to his wife? Or why would a father let his children go through abuse at his own hands for so long? Instead of asking "why does she allow it to happen?" we should ask, "Why does he continue to abuse?" Why do we blame the abused for someone else's behavior but do nothing to speak out against the abuser? Yet if a woman chooses to leave, she is condemned for abandoning her marriage or depriving her children of a father, but if she stays to try to hold her family together, to hope, she is condemned for subjecting her children to the abuse.

There is hope for domestic violence to stop when society

stops blaming the abused for honoring marriage vows or keeping children safe and starts holding abusers accountable for their decision to destroy marriages, break apart families or harm their partners and children by perpetuating the abuse. Women do not choose for their husbands or partners to abuse them or their children.

Domestic violence might stop when we stop excusing the abuse by saying she deserved it because she drank or didn't work or had it coming, or condoning abusive behavior with the myriad of excuses used to defend abusers, not the least being charm, success and a great public persona. No one deserves to be abused. Abused women come from all socio-economic, educational, professional, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Likewise, so do abusers.

Domestic violence has hope to stop when we stop both silence and ignorance and start asking ourselves what we did to speak out against abuse, to help the abused find safety, counseling, financial support or just be a friend, instead of turning a blind eye or pointing a blaming finger.

Yes, unfortunately, Judge Willmore sent a very strong message to society. As long as those in authority, and society, too, remain ignorant, and worse, tolerant of domestic violence, as long as we continue to blame and condemn the abused instead of helping them, domestic violence will not stop, especially when it is supported by the legal system.

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"Right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude o

Opinion

