

# THE BARRIE EXAMINER

## Violence a growing problem: expert

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Domestic violence is a black cloud that looms over Barrie.

That cloud may have just darkened again following a homicide involving a Barrie man and his estranged wife on the weekend.

Barrie police have charged 46-year-old Daniel Simon of Barrie with second-degree murder after his estranged 45-year-old wife, Michelle Simon, was stabbed Sunday afternoon. Police say the couple had been separated for eight years, but a possible motive has yet to be determined.

The news saddened Lynda Muir, who said the woman's death is unusual considering the length of her separation from her husband.

"This situation does happen, but it's very rare," said Muir, executive director of the Women and Children's Shelter Barrie. "If they were estranged for that long, why would she still be in contact with him? Usually, we hear of this happening right after a woman has left or while she's trying to leave him.

"For it to happen after eight years, that tells me there must be some reason why they had to stay in contact," she added.

Muir said Sunday's incident is just another example of how domestic violence is a growing problem in Barrie.

"There has been an

increase in domestic violence going on (in Barrie)," Muir said. "There's a visible difference from last (fiscal) year to this one.

"Relationships are becoming more unhealthy and I'd say there's a lot more (domestic) violence going on that we don't even hear about," she added.

Muir said from April 2008 to March 2009, 121 women and 138 children were seen at the shelter alone. Another 626 women were seen through the shelter's offsite outreach services, and another 171 women through the transitional housing support program.

"In one way or another, the ladies who come here come to us traumatized. They have been beaten, belittled, verbally and emotionally abused or controlled," Muir said. "That's the biggest element we deal with here, helping women sort through the feelings and abuse they've experienced."

Muir said physical violence isn't always the worse form of abuse toward women.

"We often think this kind of case, violence causing death, is the ugliest. Physical violence is, but verbal and emotional abuse can be just as debilitating," she said. "We have women who come here and don't have their own bank account,

can't manage to go grocery shopping or shop for clothes for themselves because they've been so controlled by their abusive partner."

The Women and Children's Shelter has 27 beds for women and children, and allows stays up to two months. It also connects victims to the services they need to move on. The shelter's crisis helpline number is 728-2544.

"Our counsellors will talk with them, create a safety plan if they leave the shelter and will hook them up with outreach services," Muir said. "We can help get them signed up for Ontario Works if they're unemployed, and we have lawyers who will come and help them fill out any legal documents for custody issues or divorce."

But Muir said more must be done locally to prevent domestic violence from starting at a much younger age.

"There are no violence prevention programs in Simcoe County's schools," she said. "I think it's a program that's needed here, and it would mean talking to girls and boys about respecting your boyfriends or girlfriends and treating them well without resorting to violence of any kind."

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