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SARAH BALDWIN: October is Domestic Abuse Awareness Month, and while the month is almost over, domestic violence remains a persistent problem, some might even call it a public health emergency. I spoke today with Vanessa Volz, executive director of Sojourner House, which provides advocacy and support for victims of domestic and sexual violence, and Rose McDermott, a political scientist and an expert in political psychology.

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Rose, Vanessa, thank you very much for being here today.

ROSE Thanks for having me.

MCDERMOTT:

VANESSA VOLZ: Thanks for having me.

SARAH BALDWIN: I have heard sexual assault and domestic violence described as a public health epidemic. Vanessa, do you agree with that assessment?

VANESSA VOLZ: I would absolutely agree with that assessment for various reasons. So we know-- if you want to talk statistics, we know that one out of four women in the United States will be a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime. We know that at least one out of five women will be a victim of sexual assault. We know that those numbers are low because of underreporting.

We also know that abuse affects all genders and sexual orientations, so we know that male identified victims exists. So when you think about those numbers, I always say, if you have not been affected personally, you know someone who has, whether or not they have disclosed that to you. So I would absolutely agree it's a public health epidemic.

SARAH BALDWIN: And according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, calls have gone up to the hotline 30% in just this year. Do you have any thoughts on why that might be?

VANESSA VOLZ: Well, so it's interesting that you mentioned that, because we were looking at some of the data at our own agency-- and we're a local Rhode Island-based agency-- and in the past year, we

have actually seen the number of clients we've served double. It's gone up 113% just in the last 12 months. So a lot of our funding sources are on a federal fiscal year, which starts October 1, so we've been compiling a lot of data since it's October, and we were pretty astonished by that number ourselves.

I do think that because there's more conversation in the media, in our communities about domestic and sexual violence that more victims and survivors are coming forward. I think a lot of the conversations are triggering to victims and survivors. And so I think that a lot of people are reaching out for resources and support.

And it's been challenging to accommodate the requests that we've received. We have waiting lists for our housing programs, for our counseling programs. And so we're doing our best to try to accommodate, but we certainly are seeing an increase.

SARAH BALDWIN: Do you need more funds or more people or both?

VANESSA VOLZ: We always need more funds and more people. And my agency has grown quite a bit. I mean, the last four years, our agency budget has actually tripled, and we've been able to bring on more staff and expand programming. And it's kind of this double-edged sword that the more visible we become in the community, the more referrals we get, and so we actually are serving more people than we've ever served in our agency's history, and we also have a waiting list that's bigger than we've ever seen it before.

SARAH BALDWIN: Wow. Do you think any of this-- well, I should say, what do you think the consequences of Professor Blasey Ford's testimony will be or are already?

CHRISTINE BLASEY FORD: My name is Christine Blasey Ford, I am here today not because I want to be, I am terrified. I'm here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school.

VANESSA VOLZ: I had a lot of survivors tell me that it was hard to watch, the testimony, that it triggered their own experiences. I think a lot of people-- everyone deals with trauma in different ways. So some people want to talk about it, some people want support, other people need to do it individually. And I also think it's important to recognize, even if someone has not directly experienced domestic or sexual violence, again, you know someone who has. So you have a mother or a sister or a friend who has experienced that, and that can have a domino effect. If someone that is close to you is going through a difficult time, that can have an impact on

your workplace, it can have an impact on your personal relationships, it can have an impact on friendships. So it's not just isolated incidents. These are incidents that really affect our entire community.

SARAH BALDWIN: I think there was a second trauma too. Watching the testimony, I think that was one trauma for people, and then how she was treated and how her words were treated after, it must have been a second trauma.

VANESSA VOLZ: We can probably spend the whole podcast just talking about that. But I think you're absolutely right. I mean, a lot of conversations I've been part of within the antiviolence movement is really this sobering reality, how far have we come in the last 20, 30, 40 years?

Sojourner House was founded in 1976, and we've been in existence for 42 years, and we've made a ton of progress in some ways. I mean, in 1976 marital rape was still legal. So there there have been some advancements when you think about legal responses to violence. But at the same time, culturally, we really have so much work to do when someone shares a story like that and there's still so much disbelief that that happened.

SARAH BALDWIN: Or denial.

VANESSA VOLZ: Right.

SARAH BALDWIN: Rose, you've done work that points to why gendered violence is bad for national security and international security. Can you make the connection for us there?

ROSE
MCDERMOTT: If you look at the history of the 20th century, there have been more missing women, as Amartya Sen has said, and more women have died as a result of maternal mortality, infant mortality, sex-selected abortion, issues related to domestic violence and murder and rape and things like that than all the men have died in combat over the history of the 20th century. And so no one talks about that, but they do talk about the number of deaths that happen in war.

SARAH BALDWIN: McDermott recently published a book in which she describes the harmful effects of the practice of polygyny on individual women and on society as a whole.

ROSE
MCDERMOTT: If you think about the amount of money that has been committed to fighting wars and to helping soldiers, which can be completely legitimate, the amount of money that's actually put toward protecting women, you can't even say that it comes good enough to pale by comparison. There's just not the same amount of resources that are put forward. And some of

the work that I've done, in particular on polygyny and polygynous countries around the world, where men marry multiple women, you see a series of downstream hugely negative effects for women, for children, for junior men, and for the nation states.

So you get huge effects on things like maternal mortality, infant mortality, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, the extent to which both boys and girls receive primary and secondary education. But you also get real restrictions in civil liberties, really restrictions in political rights, and also greater amounts of weapons spending and a greater propensity for violence. And so there's a deep connection between the ways that people learn conflict resolution in their household and the way that they then decide is appropriate forms of conflict resolution between states.

SARAH BALDWIN: So within the state and among states?

ROSE
MCDERMOTT: Yeah. There's actually a very interesting French political philosopher, Sylviane Agacinski, and she makes a very interesting argument about the relationship between what happens in the family growing up where children see, OK, my parents negotiate, my father respects my mother when they have disagreements, they sort of figure it out, and then they grow up to be people who support things like sanctions and diplomacy and international conflict. And then households where dad beats up mom to get his way are people who then support really interventionist forms of foreign policy. And so those patterns of relationships that are learned really early get carried on to have bigger macro effects in ways that people, I think, often fail to realize the importance of that kind of learning and how it feeds out into the rest of the world throughout the rest of the course of their lives.

SARAH BALDWIN: McDermott says not many people are doing research in this field, but points to Valerie Hudson, director of the program on women peace and security in The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

ROSE
MCDERMOTT: And she talks about how the first political order is really that that happens between men and women, and that all forms of inequality, or equality, as it were, grow out of the fundamental relationship between men and women that's learned, sons and their mothers and daughters and their fathers and between you parents, and that this first political order is actually the foundational basis for all subsequent political forms of order. So when you think about inequality between races, inequality between people of different economic classes, inequality around issues of nation state military power, I mean, it's really all built around notions of

hierarchy that depend on fundamental inequality between men and women and the extent to which men will go and pay and fight in order to maintain a hierarchy and dominance over women, and then utilize women's productive and reproductive capacity to their own benefit.

SARAH BALDWIN: So if I'm going to extrapolate, and we have in this country one in four women is a victim of domestic abuse?

VANESSA VOLZ: That's reported.

SARAH BALDWIN: Yes, that's reported. Therefore many more than one in four.

VANESSA VOLZ:

ROSE Does that include violence against men, or is that just--

MCDERMOTT:

VANESSA VOLZ: No, just one in four women.

ROSE OK, so that doesn't even count the men who may be raped by their fathers, uncles, brothers,

MCDERMOTT: priests, whatever.

SARAH BALDWIN: So it's just one out of four women. And then connecting that to American foreign policy and America's sense of itself in the world and its role in the world, it kind of jives with what you're saying.

ROSE Yeah, I mean, I don't think those connections are accidental. I mean, when you think about

MCDERMOTT: countries that don't have very militaristic foreign policies, for example, like Scandinavia, those are countries where you have much more equality between men and women on things like pay for work, on state-supported childcare, on state-supported medical care. So women don't have to be as financially dependent on men in order to be able to raise their children, for example. And that frees them to leave situations that are not safe and secure for them.

And so men then need to be nice in order to keep women and their children. They don't just-- they can't just use brute financial force in order to retain control. And so you don't see those countries having incredibly militaristic foreign policies. And yet, the ones where you do see enormous militarist foreign policies, they tend to be countries where there's a real sex ratio imbalance.

And by that, I mean more men relative to women. So that happens for a number of reasons, not least of which is sex-selected abortion, which is a huge problem in both India and China. So that now you end up in parts of India and China having 124 men per 100 women, and this causes all kinds of political and social instabilities because there's an enormous number of men then who can't find wives and can't have children.

And so the state needs to do something with those men because they can't have them sitting around. Because it's not the rich men who don't have wives. It's the poor men who don't have wives. And so you don't want them banding together and overturning the state or somehow having a revolution. And so one of the easiest ways to get rid of them is to put them in the army and have them fight someone else, because then that gets rid of a lot of them.

SARAH BALDWIN: McDermott and Hudson agree that understanding the implications of women's financial dependence on men is key to understanding the burning question of why women stay in abusive relationships.

VANESSA VOLZ: I think too, Rose, the point you made about the economic dependence that victims often have on their abuser, and we so many times will see a victim or survivor return to an abusive situation because it's just not feasible to support herself and/or her children, and in that situation, oftentimes victims will make the decision to go back to an abusive situation, even though they know that realistically, it's not going to change. The environment's not going to change, but just knowing economically, they can't continue to live in a shelter, and they know they can't afford rent on their own, and they don't see a possibility of that changing anytime soon.

ROSE
MCDERMOTT: Right. And I think that's such an important point, because sometimes I see people judging women who stay with abusive men in a negative way, and I think that it's really important to be compassionate toward people who really want the best for their children. And sometimes the best for their children, for them, the only option is to return to somebody who may be abusing them, but provides the wherewithal so that they can feed their children and educate their children. And it doesn't make it right, but I mean-- it certainly doesn't make the abuse right, but you can come to understand why someone would do that if what they're really trying to do is protect their children.

And so coming up with wonderful programs like what you have at Sojourner House, or even just state-supported halfway houses and safe houses and so on is really important to allow

women to have places where they can feel secure about their ability to feed and raise their children without being subjected to abuse. I know when I worked at the methadone maintenance clinic at the San Francisco VA years ago, there were a number of women who were systematically abused by their partners. And it was around the time that the state actually changed the law, because there were a number of women who would get beaten up and they would report it, and then when it would come up for trial, they would withdraw the charge.

And we'd say to them, why are you doing this? You know he's going to do it again. And she would basically say, I have no other means of support.

And so finally what the state did is they changed it so that the crime was no longer against the woman, it was against the state so that she could not withdraw her accusation. If she came into the ER, it then became a reportable offense that the state then would prosecute, and if she decided that she still loved him and wanted to stay with him or needed his money or whatever, it didn't matter. The state was still going to prosecute the crime and put him in jail. And it radically, at least at that point in time, radically reduced the number of women who died as a result of second, third, fourth series of events.

SARAH BALDWIN: That's fascinating. Along those lines, I didn't realize that I didn't even know about the #SurvivorSpeaks, which is for people to speak out about having been victims of intimate partner violence. And it hasn't had the groundswell of support, and it hasn't multiplied the way #MeToo did, and I wondered if you had any thoughts on why that would be.

VANESSA VOLZ: I think survivors coming forward and sharing their story is very complicated and nuanced. I actually was at an event last night, I was at a public hearing with one of my board members, and we were petitioning for some financial support from a local town, and she had invited me to come because she's a member, and she shared her story that she was a survivor. And it was something that I knew, but she had never shared it publicly before. And she's a professional woman, and the abuse happened a long time ago, but it's still rattled her.

And it is very-- it's not an easy thing to do, to share your story, even under the most welcoming of circumstances. And so putting your story out there on social media for anyone to read, I don't think that's really a hospital environment for a lot of people. I mean, I know it probably works for some, but probably not everyone.

There's still a lot of victim blaming that goes on in our culture. And I mean, I think that's-- there was something you mentioned earlier on about what's changed in the last 40 years in the

movement, and I still see so much victim blaming. And we saw it even during the Kavanaugh hearings, right? There was so much discussion about, well, if it really happened, why didn't you come forward when you were this 15-year-old girl?

ROSE Trump, mocked her afterwards.

MCDERMOTT:

VANESSA VOLZ: I know.

ROSE I thought that was such a bad public lesson, because people who've been abused are going to

MCDERMOTT: look at that and say, why should I come forward if I'm going to be mocked, if I'm going to be disbelieved, and if it isn't going to change the outcome? It was a very powerful lesson that basically, you're voiceless, you're powerless. You can take this huge risk, and it's not going to change the outcome, and you're going to be publicly mocked and publicly threatened.

VANESSA VOLZ: And your alleged perpetrator will be rewarded.

ROSE Exactly.

MCDERMOTT:

VANESSA VOLZ: Grandly.

SARAH BALDWIN: I asked McDermott and Hudson how they managed not to despair when their daily work reveals such devastating truths about society.

VANESSA VOLZ: We talk a lot about self care within the social service movement for good reason. So there are a couple of things that really keep me motivated, and I've been doing this work for a while now. One is I sincerely, truly, with all my heart believe no one deserves to be in an abusive relationship. And I also sincerely, truly believe that as humans, I think we can evolve to the point where we don't have abuse. I really do think that it's possible.

So that keeps me going. And the second thing that keeps me going in terms of the work that I do with Sojourner House, on the ground work in the community, is that although I hear and see so many horrible things on a daily basis, I don't obviously do direct client work as the executive director, but I certainly hear about the clients we're serving, and I hear horrible things, but I also see people give to the agency and give back to our clients in a very unselfish way. I have a volunteer board of directors that's extremely engaged.

We could not do our work without volunteers and donors. We've started calling them investors in our work, kind of moving away from this charity model. I mean, we really are trying to shift cultural attitudes in our society, which is really important work. And we have investors that are willing to support us in that way.

And sometimes people just do amazing things. I have someone on my advisory committee who is an artist on the side, and last month, she hosted an art reception and raised \$15,000 through art sales and donated it all to Sojourner House. And I said to her, wow, you just housed a family of four for an entire year. How does that feel? That's what keeps me going.

SARAH BALDWIN: What about you, Rose?

ROSE I guess there's a couple of things. One is, when I started getting involved in developing the
MCDERMOTT: WomansStats database with Val Hudson and a couple of other people, we really thought it was important to just find out what was true about what was going on around the world. And so a lot of it was just driven by curiosity about how bad is it, and where is it worse than other places?

And so trying to actually develop an evidentiary base was important for us because a lot of people don't believe things. And so a lot of people won't be persuaded by facts, but some people are persuaded by facts. And so some of it is about having the evidence.

I won't lie to you, it's incredibly depressing to go through some of this. And when I initially started collecting data on say, rape or murder rates around the world, it was just unbelievably depressing. And every day, I would think about how lucky I was to just be born at a place and a time by chance where I didn't have to get married off at 12 to somebody who was going to rape me and throw acid in my face. And a lot of it really is just accident of where you get born.

And so I spend a lot of time being overwhelmingly grateful about the fact that I've been blessed enough to be able to be well-educated enough to make my own living so that when I go home at night, I can lock the door, and I don't have to let anybody in I don't want to let in. And that is a-- that's a blessing that really only my generation of women and younger than me have ever been able to have in any major way. And so part of the hope comes out of gratitude, and recognizing that if we can move a billion people out of poverty in 10 years, we can move a million women to not be as abused, or as absent, or as hurt as might have happened the 10 years prior. That's the work.

SARAH BALDWIN: And that will benefit men as well.

ROSE Oh, absolutely. Especially sons, right? Especially children. And raising sons in a particular way
MCDERMOTT: and with a particular model is a really, really important way to move forward.

And one of the benefits of MeToo and even all the other dreck that's come out in the face of the Kavanaugh hearings and so on, for me, is it surfaces stuff that probably has always been going on and attitudes and ideas. But you can't talk about it until you know that that stuff exists and you can talk about it openly and it's no longer hidden. And so maybe it's like an infection, where you need to root it out, and then you can actually start to have the Sun and the light and the heat try and transform it into something that can begin to scar over and heal in a somewhat positive way. And I think if you don't have hope, it's hard to keep going in these kinds of processes.

VANESSA VOLZ: When I speak about feminism, I always say, feminism ultimately benefits men as well as benefiting women. Because as a society, we have set unrealistic expectations about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. And so the more that we can embrace gender equality in our culture, the more that's going to benefit men as much as women.

ROSE Oh, absolutely. I mean, the best statistics on that are what happened to men when they're
MCDERMOTT: older if their wives die or they get depressed. I mean, if their wives die or they get divorced, if they don't get remarried within 18 months, they die. What does it look like when we actually start to outsource caring, labor, and emotional labor and have men participate in that in a different way, and I think that that benefits men. It benefits their morbidity and it benefits their prospects for mortality as well.

SARAH BALDWIN: Well, Rose, thank you for all the important research you're doing and for getting this research in the right hands. And Vanessa, thank you for all the work you're doing on the ground with very real people every day. And thank you both for coming and talking to us about that.

VANESSA VOLZ: Oh, well, thank you for having me.

ROSE Thanks for having us. Thanks, Sarah.

MCDERMOTT:

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