

Stop the Silence, End the Violence

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Before we even arrived for orientation at MIT freshman year, we were all supposed to have completed an online program of alcohol, sexual misconduct and general safety training. I don't remember much about those videos besides the amazingly awkward acting, but I do remember having to take an exam and perhaps a survey at the end to make sure I understood the important life lessons I had just been taught.

Once we got to campus and made it past orientation, I heard a whole lot of talk again about alcohol and party behavior, but I don't think I heard a single mention of domestic violence until I went through recruitment and heard about Alpha Chi Omega's philanthropy. People don't like to talk about domestic violence. Alcohol seems easy—you just tell people to refrain from drinking, or watch what they drink, or limit their drinking. Drugs seem easy—don't do them. But relationships? How do you deal with those? Many are healthy, but many are not. Domestic violence is just as prevalent as alcohol abuse, if not more so.

In the United States, 35.6 percent of women and 28.5 percent of men experience violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime, according to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey in 2010, which surpasses the percentage of students at MIT who binge drink (26 percent), as measured by a survey administered by the Office of Community Development and Substance Abuse and Community Wellness at MIT Medical in 2013.

The difference between the visibility of alcohol/drug abuse and domestic violence is pretty easy to explain.



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Alcohol and drug abuse often happen amidst the noisy excitement and sensory overload of social situations,

whereas domestic violence usually lurks in the shadows, behind closed doors. You might see the results of domestic violence in tired eyes and distracted thoughts, but few people realize the true cause. Many of those who do see it consider it a private matter and turn a blind eye to what may be a criminal offense.

Breaking the silence about domestic violence is a necessary step forward. The sisters of Alpha Chi Omega chose domestic violence awareness as their national philanthropy because we wanted to bring forward to the spotlight this huge issue that is so hard to talk about. Domestic violence is a problem that we can directly help to address by raising awareness, because sometimes a listening ear and an expression of support may be the first step on a survivor's path to recovery.

Measures have been taken to address this issue on MIT's campus, especially by the MIT Program for Violence Prevention & Response (VPR), founded in 2008, but much more can still be done to increase awareness. The Theta Omicron chapter of Alpha Chi Omega sponsored Domestic Violence Awareness (DVA) Week October 6-10, where buying a friend a carnation, joining a photo campaign, or attending Alpha Epsilon Phi's Take Back the Night event helped spread the message that love shouldn't hurt.

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