

JUSTSOUTH MONTHLY

Why doesn't she just leave? **October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.**

By Dr. Rae Taylor

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2026 Guest Editor: Christian Bolden, Ph.D. • *JustSouth* Editor: Scotty Wolffe, B.S.

The color purple is ubiquitous in New Orleans, symbolizing royalty, power, and of course, Mardi Gras. The color also represents courage and survival, which is why it was chosen for the domestic violence awareness ribbon over forty years ago.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness month in the U.S., a time designated to keep vigil for victims and survivors, including more than 11,000 who have been killed in domestic violence murders over the past five years, and several million who have experienced non-lethal domestic violence. It is also a time to spread awareness for violence and abuse that has historically been distinctly fraught with misunderstanding and victim-blaming. The vast majority of these victims and survivors are women; thus, intimate partner violence is *gendered violence*. Experts believe this is why awareness is so low and apathy is so high.

More than one in three U.S. women are victims of physical violence by a current or former intimate partner in their lifetimes. Nearly 1 in 10 women have been sexually assaulted by an intimate partner. Stalking is experienced by 1 in 7 women, and over 1/3 of women experience multiple forms of violence throughout their adult lives. Approximately 1 in 10 men in the U.S. also experience sexual violence,

physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

“Why doesn’t she just leave?”

Over half of women killed annually in the U.S. are killed by an intimate partner, with most of those acts committed after the woman has left or attempted to leave the abuser. Further, the majority of mass murders committed in the U.S. occur in the *family* – many more than in schools, churches, theaters, concerts, and other public places. Again, these events usually occur after the victim of the abuse has left the abuser. Nevertheless, victim-blame persists. **The answer to this pervasive question is that most *do* leave, but leaving is the most dangerous time, and that period of acute danger continues long after the escape from the relationship.**

For the past 26 years, I have worked in the field of gender-based violence, beginning as a victim advocate in the criminal legal system, then as a teacher and scholar. For the past decade, I have also served as an expert witness and consultant. My cases involve domestic violence battery, sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, trafficking, and murder. I have worked on numerous cases where an abuser is being charged for *all* of these crimes.

When I work with prosecutors, it is to lend my expertise in hopes of bringing justice in cases where an abuser is being tried for their crimes- usually at the conclusion of years of brutal abuse against their partner, who is almost always a woman trapped by coercive control so manipulative and frightening that even the police could not protect them. When I work on a defense team, the defendant is usually a woman who is being tried for the murder of the abuser. In all of these cases, the woman killed her abuser as a final desperate attempt to save her life and/or the lives of her children, often in the context of defending themselves from imminent death against an abuser who was about to make good on years of threats to kill them. As if that was not unjust enough, women who commit acts of violence against their abusers, sexual assailants, and/or traffickers are far more likely to be arrested, charged, tried, and convicted of their crimes of self-defense or

crimes committed under duress, and they typically receive harsher sentences than those who commit violence against women. *Most* women incarcerated in U.S. prisons suffered abuse throughout their lives prior to incarceration.



Criminalized domestic violence survivors visited Dr. Taylor's Women and Crime course in Spring 2026. These women are clients and staff members of the Louisiana Parole Project after many years incarcerated.

These women are only defendants or are convicted because they are *survivors*. They felt the only means of survival was defending themselves against their abuser. **Every single woman I have worked with in these cases - whether for the prosecution or the defense, whether pre-trial or post-conviction, have either turned to the**

police and discovered the protection is inadequate for victims of these acts of violence, or they have learned that the punishment they will endure from the abuser for calling the police makes turning to the police *more* dangerous.

Abused women are often involved in crimes under the duress of an abuser so violent and controlling that they risk being killed for so much as talking back, changing their hairstyle, or shielding their child from the abuser's violence - let alone refusing to follow orders in the context of an abuser committing a crime. They are sitting in jails awaiting trial and in prisons serving long sentences or life without the possibility for parole for crimes their abusers are wholly responsible for. These women were hostages in their violent relationships. Now they are hostages in our prisons.

Louisiana consistently has one of the highest rates of femicide - that is, the murder of women, nearly always at the hands of their current or former boyfriend or husband. Every single one of these deaths is preventable. It is a failure of many systems in our society (not just the legal systems) when someone - anyone - dies in domestic violence. It is a failure of our social systems when a woman has to kill her abuser to protect

herself and her children. It is a failure of our social systems when her child has to kill their father or stepfather to protect their mother and siblings. Although there are currently laws in every state criminalizing physical and sexual violence and stalking, the persistently high rates indicate little shift in this cultural phenomenon.



Dr. Taylor and students from her Domestic Violence course participated in Take Back the Night at Loyola during Domestic Violence Awareness month in October 2023.

I hope you will join me in holding vigil and spreading awareness, not just this month, but every month. I wear my purple ribbon every day, tattooed on my ankle, but I'm sure you can pick a ribbon up at the Women's Resource Center at Loyola, the New Orleans Family Justice Center, Sexual Trauma Awareness & Response (STAR), or the New Orleans Women &

Children's Shelter. Grab one for your friends as well. Consider attending Take Back the Night on October 27th, or one of the many other events in the area this month, and be a part of the solution. Take Back the Night tabling will begin at 5 P.M., the main event will begin at 6 P.M., and the Speak-Out will begin at 7 P.M.

Domestic violence affects everyone in our society. We shouldn't have to have sisters or daughters to begin to care about the interpersonal safety of girls and women. *We all come from women.* It is on all of us to end this violence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rae Taylor is the Rev. Joseph H. Fitcher, S.J. Distinguished Professor and founder of the Gender-Based Violence Research Project at Loyola University New Orleans. Her teaching and research are informed by her dedication to service in the community. She is a renowned legal consultant and expert witness in cases involving gender-based violence around the country, she is a member of the New Orleans Fatality Review Team, and has served as a volunteer medical victim advocate with the New Orleans Family Justice Center/University Medical Center. Professor Taylor regularly provides training and presentations to a variety of organizations and government agencies around the state.

REFERENCES

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Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu.

AROUND JSRI

JSRI NEWS

Weekly Event Post

Upcoming Event Weekly Digest on our Instagram

We'll be posting a weekly guide to what's happening at Loyola and around New Orleans – from campus events to things to do across the city!

[See our most recent post here →](#)

Authorized Pleasures: The Practice of Intimate Visitation in Colombian Prisons

2025 Affiliate Fellow Dr. Diana Soto-Olson's class; Friday, October 9th, 1:30–2:20 on Zoom.

In Colombia, people in prison have the right to private and intimate visits, including LGBTQ people. However, making these visits happen can be

UPCOMING EVENTS

In the Community

Crime and Punishment in America Screening

October is Youth Justice Action Month! Louisiana Center for Children's Rights is showing "Crime and Punishment in America," which explores our country's history of criminal justice. Following that, we will have a discussion led by currently incarcerated young people, centering their experiences and vision for a more just future. The event is free, food will be provided, and kids are welcome!

Thursday, October 8th from 6:30–9 P.M. at 3OneOne6; 3116 St. Claude Ave.

[See the post here →](#)

Ballot Bash

Come out to the Women with a Vision offices for a kick-back just for

complicated and challenging in practice. This presentation by Dr. Joseph Hiller, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Amherst College, looks at the role of community, intimacy, and pleasure in making these visits possible behind bars.

[See the flyer here →](#)

first time voters ages 17-21. There will be refreshments, a DJ, candidates, and everything you need to get ready to make your voices heard at the ballot boxes. It is absolutely critical that the people who will have to live with the consequences of elections the longest — young people — are heard loud and clear at the ballot box. The decisions you make will shape your future and communities. Come out, get registered, and head to the ballot box with confidence.

**Sunday, October 11th from 1–4 P.M.
at 2016 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.**

[See the post here →](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

Loyola Women's Studies Program: Collaborative Grant

All Loyola faculty and full-time students can apply for up to \$1,000 in grant funding for faculty-student collaboration. Projects should explore women's issues, such as how gender and sexuality affect daily experience, broader social structures, institutions, social relations, and cultural and aesthetic production. Submissions are open until November 2nd.

[View the opportunity here →](#)

WHAT WE'RE READING

"It is time for New Orleans to pause on surveillance technology."

Read this open letter to Mayor Helena Moreno and the New Orleans City Council written by Bruce Reilly, deputy director of Voice of the Experienced (VOTE).

[Read the article here →](#)



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