

Women share stories of suffering

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T-shirts of different colors and sizes hung on clotheslines at Ypao Beach Park yesterday, representing different ways in which women are abused. Handwritten messages on the cotton garments told stories of support and survival.

Local nonprofit group Guma' Mami has been holding the clothesline project for the past few years, said Director Berni Grajek, but this is the first time the event has been held in a beach-picnic setting.

"It's not anything intimidating, it's just a way for people to share," Grajek said.

The subject matter is serious: Domestic violence and violence against women happens in the community, even though Grajek said many people don't want to accept that it happens in their own families.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the Clothesline Project is one of the events in the community to help raise awareness about the issue.

Vulnerable disabled

Guma' Mami is a nonprofit organization that provides services to people with disabilities. Grajek said both women and men with disabilities don't report abuse.

"They're in a very vulnerable position where a lot of times, the perpetrator is a caregiver. So if the perpetrator is a caregiver, and they report, more than likely they'll be removed from the home and placed at an emergency shelter or in an institution somewhere," she said.

Grajek said some have told her that they would rather put up with it so they have a place to live.

Meaningful colors

Grajek pointed out a red shirt with a white jagged line resembling a heartbeat on a monitor. It was made by a victim who remembered the image from her time in the hospital's intensive-care unit.

The red shirts, along with pink and orange, represents women who have survived rape and sexual assault.

The white shirts represent women who have died because of violence.

Yellow or beige shirts represent women who were battered or assaulted, blue and green represent women who survived incest and sexual abuse.

Purple or lavender shirts represent women attacked because of their sexual orientation, and black shirts represent women who were attacked because of political reasons.

One shirt had the words of a poem written by a boy who witnessed domestic violence erupt in his own home.

"He comes home drunk with much to complain, Yells and yells but all he calls is my mother's name. She blooms off her bed, bright and beautiful as a flower. But within seconds, she's dark in the darkness of his beatings for hours and hours," the poet wrote.

Grajek said the number of domestic violence cases is too high.

"One of our responsibilities as a community is to intervene and I think a lot of us are afraid to intervene," Grajek said.