

The Tragic Death of Fatima Larios: An Opportunity for Education on Dating Violence

We recognize the importance of turning Fatima's tragic death into an opportunity for education and remembrance.

Today, we—Chadron State College President Randy Rhine and the parents of a student who died by suicide on campus—come together to announce a lasting legacy for Fatima Larios on Chadron State College's campus.

Fatima died by suicide on January 31, 2015, at age 19, during her sophomore year at Chadron State College, after being in a toxic relationship with a fellow student-athlete that involved dating violence.

Fatima was a beloved daughter, sister, friend, and softball teammate. Her family knew her as someone always overcoming the odds and doing the extraordinary. Not long after her premature birth, Fatima learned to swim before she could even walk. Soon after she started to walk, Fatima learned how to ride a bicycle.

Fatima was a standout athlete, to say the least, in her community on the Monterey Peninsula in California. Fatima graduated from a Catholic high school where she played soccer, basketball, water polo, and softball, and earned a college athletic scholarship.

In 2014, after playing Division I softball in Tennessee, Fatima transferred to Chadron State College and joined its softball team, in part because her boyfriend at the time, also a student-athlete, had decided to attend Chadron State College after graduating from high school. Fatima made many friends in the tight-knit Chadron State College community, especially amongst her Eagles teammates.

But Fatima's relationship with her boyfriend grew increasingly toxic, and it appears that they were stuck in a cycle of dating violence.

Dating Violence: What Is It, and What Are the Consequences?

Dating violence, a form of intimate partner violence (IPV), is defined by the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence as "repeated verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse used to frighten, hurt, and control a girlfriend or boyfriend." A federal law known as Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination at educational institutions, provides protections to the many students who experience IPV.

IPV can happen to anyone, anywhere—regardless of size, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. IPV can occur in any relationship: dating, living together, or married. Women overwhelmingly bear the burden of IPV worldwide, and "the most common perpetrators of violence against women are male intimate partners or ex-partners," according to the Anxiety and Depression Society of America. However, men can also suffer abuse by an intimate partner. Sometimes people who experience IPV fight back, either in self-defense or in retaliation for the abuse—which is sometimes called "violent resistance." Violent resistance is also a form of IPV. IPV is more common than most people think: In the United States, one of every three women, and one of every four men, have suffered physical abuse by a partner in their lifetime.

The consequences of IPV can be serious and long-lasting. People in relationships involving IPV may suffer emotionally, psychologically, and physically. They are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, use drugs and alcohol, and engage in self-harm and suicide.

Fatima and Her Boyfriend's Toxic Relationship

Fatima struggled with many of the same behaviors to which others in toxic relationships often, and unfortunately, turn as coping mechanisms. As is too often the case, the false hope seemingly offered through such efforts to avoid ugly truths about the abusive relationship with her boyfriend turned into additional challenges with depressive emotions, alcohol abuse, and, ultimately, suicide. Fatima and her boyfriend's toxic relationship also resulted in a cycle of violence with which they had to grapple.

In the fall of 2014, some of Fatima's softball teammates noticed changes in Fatima's behavior and bruises that appeared inconsistent with their sport. They became concerned for her wellbeing and reached out to Fatima, who told them her boyfriend had caused the bruises. They reported this to their assistant coach, who escalated the report and reached out to Fatima. Chadron State College's dormitory staff also reached out to Fatima. Additionally, one of Chadron State College's Title IX Coordinators exchanged emails with Fatima after her teammates raised their concerns.

Despite these efforts, Fatima responded as many people in an abusive relationship do: with a reluctance to accept or acknowledge she needed help from others. And the dating violence continued—including on campus where Fatima and her boyfriend both lived.

Tragically, less than four months after these efforts to reach out, Fatima was gone. That is why the Larios family and Chadron State College have come together today—to try to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again to another student.

Resources for Addressing IPV

Like many people who experience IPV, college students often will not perceive themselves as being abused or will not feel safe reporting what they are experiencing. It takes a whole campus community—students, administrators, faculty, and staff—to step up and address the problem.

There are national, state, local, and campus resources available for students who experience, witness, or suspect IPV. Anyone who experiences IPV or sees signs of it happening to someone else can call local enforcement or a national hotline, such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). There are also many resources available at each of the colleges in the Nebraska State College System (NSCS), including Chadron State College.

All three NSCS colleges have full-time Title IX Coordinators trained to help students. When students seek help from a Title IX Coordinator, the Title IX Coordinator will provide the students with information on campus policies, procedures, and victim services, and refer them to the wide variety of resources available to students feeling unsafe on campus for any reason. These resources include Campus Security escorts across campus, free and confidential counseling services, and help from the Disability Services and Tutoring Services offices. The Title IX Coordinators also ask that students contact them if they need help

overcoming any educational barrier created by an incident on campus. For example, this includes helping students extend deadlines for assignments or reschedule tests.

Joining Forces for Student Safety and Fatima's Legacy

Chadron State College and Fatima's family come together today to commit to steps that will ensure Fatima's legacy is one that helps others. Specifically, we are proud to jointly announce the following:

- Chadron State College has committed to continue providing annual suicide prevention training to its staff, faculty, and students for at least the next 10 years;
- As part of its ongoing Title IX compliance efforts, Chadron State College will consult with an outside expert for the next three school years regarding its Title IX policies, procedures, and practices;
- A memorial scholarship in Fatima's name (The Fatima Larios Spirit Scholarship) will be given on an annual basis, for at least the next 10 years, to a member of Chadron State College's women's softball team; and
- A memorial honoring Fatima's life and legacy will be placed on campus for at least the next 10 years.

Turning Tragedy to Opportunity

Fatima's legacy will forever have a special place at Chadron State College. Together, we recognize the importance of turning Fatima's tragic death into an opportunity for education and remembrance.

If you or someone you know needs assistance with IPV or any of its symptoms—including depression, suicidal thoughts, or substance abuse—please reach out as soon as possible to any of the resources mentioned above.