

Domestic violence is a nationwide problem that occurs among persons of all ages, genders, races, socioeconomic groups, and educational backgrounds. Also called *intimate partner violence*, domestic violence arises when one person uses force to inflict injury, either emotional or physical, upon another person with whom they have, or had, a relationship. This type of abuse occurs most commonly between spouses and partners (married or unmarried) and relatives.

Domestic violence is also referred to as partner abuse, spouse abuse, or battering (United States Department of Justice, 2015). “Domestic violence accounted for about a fifth of all violent victimizations between 2003 and 2012” (Morgan and Truman, 2014).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE U.S.

Domestic violence was made a federal felony in 1994 with the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). “VAWA is a comprehensive legislative package designed to end violence against women and was reauthorized in both 2000 and 2005. The legislative history of VAWA indicates that Congress seeks to remedy the legacy of laws and social norms that serve to justify violence against women. Since the laws passage, there has been a paradigm shift in how the issue of violence against women is addressed nationwide” (Office on Violence Against Women [OVW], n.d.).

“VAWA has vastly improved our ability to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking and has helped

countless victims of these crimes get access to needed services” (Holder, 2012).

VAWA was not reauthorized in 2011 and expired; mostly due to party politics in Congress. Despite political differences on various elements contained in the Senate version of the VAWA reauthorization bill, the House of Representatives passed a VAWA reauthorization bill on February 28, 2013 that authorized \$660 million per year for the next five years to be spent on programs to help in the prosecution of sexual assault and domestic abuse, battered women’s shelters, victims’ advocates, and other education programs (Helderman, 2013).

Although women are more likely to be the victims in domestic abuse cases, violence against men is a serious problem that is often disregarded or underestimated. In the United States, “1 in 10 women and nearly 1 in 25 men have experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner” (Breiding et al., 2014, p.38)

The most recent report of the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 9.4% of women have been raped by an intimate partner during their lifetimes; 15.9% of women and 8.0% of men experienced other forms of sexual violence by an intimate partner; 32.9% of women and 28.1% of men experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner; and 10.7% of women and 2.1% of men have been a victim of stalking by an intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2014, pp.13-18).

In the case of intimate partner homicides, which make up 40-50% of all murders of women, the man physically abused the woman before the murders in 70-80% of the cases, regardless of which partner was killed (National Institute of Justice, 2007). In 2013, “62% of female homicide victims were wives or in intimate acquaintances of their killers” (Violence Policy Center, 2015, p.3).

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2015) reported that 1 in 3 women have been victims of domestic violence in their lifetime. Furthermore, 30-60% of those who commit IPV crimes also abuse children in the home and “boys who witness domestic violence are *twice as likely* to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults” (Domestic Shelters, 2015).

RISK FACTORS

Some contributing factors associated with intimate partner violence are chronic alcohol abuse, high levels of marital conflict, and a lack of communication skills. The common component, though, in most incidents of intimate partner violence, is that the perpetrator has a sense of entitlement and a need to dominate and control the relationship (OVC, n.d.).

Women who encounter any form of domestic violence may eventually experience physical, psychological, and/or social consequences. They are also more likely to exhibit behaviors that present further health risks, such as substance abuse, alcoholism, and increased risk of suicide attempts (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015a). Children who witness such abuse are reported to be at greater risk of developing psychiatric disorders such as anxiety or depression, anger, and low self-esteem (OVC, n.d.).

A variety of factors contribute to the likelihood of becoming either a victim of intimate partner violence (IPV) or a perpetrator of IPV. For instance, being a victim of physical or psychological abuse as a child is one of the strongest predictors of becoming a perpetrator, but is also a predictor of becoming a victim.

Risk factors are not necessarily direct causes and not everyone identified as at-risk will become a victim or perpetrator of IPV (CDC, 2015b). The following table identifies some of the most common risk factors:

IPV Risk Factors			
Individual	Relationship	Community	Societal
Low self-esteem	Marital conflict	Poverty	Traditional gender norms
Low income	Divorce or separation	Low social capital	
Emotional dependence and insecurity	Dominance and control of the relationship by one partner over the other		
Low academic achievement	Economic stress		
Young age			
Heavy alcohol and drug use	Unhealthy family relationships		
Depression			
Anger and hostility			
Unemployment			
Antisocial personality			
Borderline personality			
(CDC, 2015b)			

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TEXAS

According to the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) (n.d.), in 2014 there were 185,817 family violence incidents, 132 women killed by their intimate partner, 23,311 adults and children received shelter from their abusive relationships.

In 2011, The University of Texas at Austin’s Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault reported the following information about intimate partner violence in Texas:

- 37.7% of women and 26.8% of men experienced some sort of family violence in their lifetime
- 21.8% of women and 16.5% of men reported currently being in an abusive relationship
- Other perpetrators of abuse were reported as
 - Ex-spouse (25%)
 - Ex-girlfriend (21%)
 - Ex-boyfriend (14%)
- The most frequent type of abuse reported by women was

- Threats of physical harm
- Being slammed against something
- Being choked, strangled, or suffocated
- The most frequent type of abuse reported by men was
 - Being hit with a fist or something hard
 - Threats of physical harm
 - Being kicked
- 57% of Texans know someone who has been in an abusive relationship
- 32.6% of Texans consider IPV to be a very serious problem

(Busch-Armendariz, Heffron, and Bohman, 2011)

In 2014, IPV made up 38.5% of family violence in Texas (Texas Department of Public Safety [DPS], 2014, p.35). In the same year, 132 women in Texas were killed as a result of IPV, five of whom lived in Bexar County, and one from Comal County (TCFV, 2014). The San Antonio police department also reported 6.2% increase in the number of family violence crimes from 10,407 in 2014 to 11,051 in 2015 (San Antonio Police Department, 2015).

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Studies from domestic violence shelters, child protection data, and other sources show that both child maltreatment and violence against women co-occur in 30 to 60 percent of families where either form of abuse is identified” (Family Violence Prevention Fund [FVPPF], 2010, p.7).

Children who are raised in homes where domestic violence occurs are also more likely to abuse others, be victims of domestic abuse themselves, be prone to dating violence, and abuse drugs and alcohol (FVPPF, 2010, p.8).

“Intimate partner violence within families puts children at high risk for severe and potentially lifelong problems with physical health, mental health, and school and peer relationships as well as for disruptive behavior” (Listenbee et al., 2012, p.4).

Children may witness acts of domestic violence by being present in the same vicinity during the incident of abuse, by hearing the violence from afar, or by seeing the aftermath of the abuse through their mother’s physical markings—bruises and broken limbs. In some cases,

children are severely traumatized by the abusive encounter and are in need of immediate intervention and therapy. In other situations, children may need to be removed from the situation and offered need-based support. Nevertheless, the impact of residing in homes where domestic violence exists is destructive to the emotional, developmental, and physical well-being of those children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012).

Studies reveal that as many as 15 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year and 85% of children who witnessed domestic violence had moderate or severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms (Groves, 2012). Symptoms that children may encounter include:

- Have frequent memories of the event
- Have upsetting and frightening dreams
- Inability to sleep through the night
- Worry about dying at an early age
- Experience headaches and stomach aches
- Exhibit irritability or angry outbursts
- Have trouble concentrating

(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2014)

Furthermore, school-aged children tend to have poor academic performance, are frequently absent from class, may exhibit behavior problems, or withdraw from social relations. Studies have shown that living in an abusive environment increases children’s risk of getting involved with the juvenile justice system (Listenbee et al., 2012).

The National Institute of Justice (2011) reported that children who grew up in violent homes had an increased likelihood of arrest: 59% as a juvenile; 28% as an adult; and 30% for a violent crime. Children may learn to use anger and aggression to resolve conflicts in their lives or to obtain control and exert power over others.

BATTERED WOMAN’S SYNDROME

This condition is best characterized as a subgroup of what the American Psychological Association (APA) defines as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, rather than as a form of mental illness. The syndrome describes a pattern of psychological and behavioral symptoms found

in women living in abusive relationships. There are four general characteristics of the syndrome: (the woman)

1. Believes that the violence was her fault.
2. Has an inability to place the responsibility for the violence elsewhere.
3. Fears for her life and/or her children's lives.
4. Has an irrational belief that the abuser is omnipresent or omniscient.

(Guillen, 2014)

Why women stay in abusive situations is a fairly complex phenomenon. Some of those reasons include:

- *Denial* – abusers can be charming and manipulative (he didn't really mean it)
- *Personal history* – prior exposure to IPV in the home as a child may cause belief that the relationship is normal
- *Fear* – threats of violence
- *Lack of resources* – have no place to go and no money
- *Love* – may consider her partner a good person and want to "fix" the relationship
- *Psychological effects* – low self-esteem, guilt, shame

(Wood, 2015)

Domestic violence affects persons of all ages across gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and education level. The vast majority of domestic violence victims are women. Although a large number of the cases go unreported due to the fact that most incidents occur in the privacy of the home, domestic violence is still a grave national problem that has the potential to inflict devastating ramifications to all persons involved.

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