

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 can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating” (United States Department of Justice, 2017b). “An average of 1.3 million nonfatal domestic violence victimizations occurred annually in the United States during the 10-year aggregate period from 2006 to 2015” (Reaves, 2017).

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 improve criminal justice responses to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking and to increase the availability of services for victims and survivors” (Office on Violence Against Women [OVW], 2016, p.1).

Each subsequent reauthorization of the Act (in 2000, 2005, and 2013), strengthened the law and made it more inclusive. VAWA 2013 included the following new provisions:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community received federal civil rights protections
- Restoration of Tribal authority to prosecute non-Indians who commit domestic violence on Indian lands

(U.S. Department of Justice, 2017a)

Total Federal appropriations for VAWA 2013 funded programs was \$481.5 million in FY 2017 (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2017)

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, over 1 in 3 women (37.3%) and nearly 1 in 3 men (30.9%) have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2017).

The most recent report of the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 16.4% of women and 7% of men have experienced some form of contact sexual violence (defined as rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact perpetrated by an intimate partner) by an intimate partner during their lifetimes; 32.4% of women and 28.3% of men experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner; and 9.7% of women and 2.3% of men have been a victim of stalking by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2017).

In 2013, “intimate partner violence was a precipitating factor in 47.5% of homicides among females but only 9.3% among males” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016b, p.11). In 2014 “63% (870) of female homicide victims were wives or in intimate acquaintances of their killers” (Violence Policy Center, 2016, p.3).

Children are also at risk. 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 substance abuse, abusive family background, and feelings of inadequacy. The common component, though, in most incidents of intimate partner violence, is that the perpetrator has a need power and control (Office for Victims of Crime [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 Preventions [CDC], 2015). 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, 2016a). 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 traits			
Borderline personality traits			
Prior history of being physically abusive			
(CDC, 2016a)			

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TEXAS

According to the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) (2017a), in 2015 there were 194,872 family violence incidents, 158 women killed by their intimate partner, 24,391 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 2015, IPV made up 39.3% of family violence in Texas (Texas Department of Public Safety [DPS], 2017, p.36). In the same year, 158 women in Texas were killed as a result of IPV, nine of whom lived in Bexar County (TCFV, 2017). The San Antonio police department also reported a 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).

One in six children witness one parent assault another parent/partner and one in five children witness a family assault (Finkelhor, et al., 2015). 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 violence such as physical injuries to family member or damage to property. “Approximately 24 States and Puerto Rico currently address in statute the issue of children who witness domestic violence

in their homes” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p.2). Texas statutes currently do not address what circumstances constitute witnessing domestic violence by a minor.

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).

Children who witnessed domestic violence may experience moderate or severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. 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
- Acting younger than their age
- Repeating behavior that reminds them of the trauma

(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2013)

Furthermore, children exposed to violence are more likely to have poor academic performance, abuse drugs or alcohol, act aggressively, and engage in criminal behavior as adults. Studies have shown that living in an abusive environment increases children’s risk of getting involved with the juvenile justice system (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2016).

A recent report published for the National Center for Juvenile Justice (Sickmund and Puzanchera, 2014) reported that children who were involved with the child welfare system were more likely to enter the juvenile justice system:

- 6 in 10 referred as first-time offenders had at least some history of child welfare involvement

- 9 in 10 youth previously referred for an offense had at least some history of child welfare involvement
- First-time offenders with records of multisystem involvement have much higher recidivism rates than youth without child welfare involvement
- Youth with an extensive history of child welfare involvement were referred for an offense three times as often as youth with no child welfare involvement

(Sickmund and Puzanchera, 2014, p.36)

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 (Walker, 2016). 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.

(NOLO, 2017)

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, 2017)

FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

There are 154 organizations in Texas that provide domestic violence services (Domestic Shelters, 2017). These services include:

- Emergency services such as emergency shelter, crisis intervention, case management, and safety planning
- Legal and financial services such as assistance with orders of protection, financial empowerment training, legal assistance/representation, and attorney referral
- Counseling services including individual and support groups
- Housing services such as transitional housing and assistance with relocation and permanent housing
- Support services such as resources and referrals, parenting and job skills training, health and wellness programs, and pet shelter
- Children's services such as youth counseling, child development and educational programs
- Community education services

In 2015, family violence programs served over 70,000 individuals in Texas. During that same year, the Texas Council on Family Violence (2017b) reported that:

- 183,294 calls were received by Texas family violence programs
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline received 16,624 calls and 1,125 chat requests from Texas
- The National Dating Abuse Hotline received 475 calls, 669 chats, and 82 texts from Texas

Unfortunately, the need for domestic violence services exceeds the availability of services, especially for shelter. In 2015, 15,869 (39%) requests for shelter went unmet due to lack of resources. 52% of all other types of services (rent and utility assistance, attorneys, etc.) also were unmet (TCFV, 2017b).

In the KCF counties of interest, there are three primary organizations that provide both residential and non-residential domestic violence services:

- Kendall County Women’s Shelter (KCWS) located in Boerne, TX
 - Crisis Center of Comal County (CCCC) located in New Braunfels, TX
 - Family Violence Prevention Services (FVPS) located in San Antonio, TX
- (Domestic Shelters, 2017)

The following table lists the primary services provided by these organizations (not a comprehensive list):

PRIMARY LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES			
	KCWS	CCCC	FVPS
24-hour Hotline	√	√	√
Case management	√	√	√
Children’s services	√	√	√
Community education	√	√	√
Counseling services	√	√	√
Crisis intervention		√	√
Emergency Shelter	√	√	√
Financial services		√	√
Legal services	√	√	√
Pet shelter	√		
Skills training	√	√	√
(KCWS, n.d.; CCCC, n.d.; FVPS, n.d.)			

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 consequences to all persons involved.

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