

“The term “domestic violence” includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person’s acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction” (United States Department of Justice, n.d.).

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.

Between 2015 and 2018 there was a 29% increase in the percentage of persons who were victims of domestic violence. In 2019, 521,870 victims reported almost 1.2 million incidents of domestic violence (Morgan and Truman, 2020).

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, 2017)

The Violence Against Women Act expired on September 30, 2018, was temporarily extended, but expired again on February 15, 2019 (American Bar Association [ABA], 2019). The VAWA Reauthorization bill passed in the House of Representatives and was forwarded to the Senate in April 2019 (Congress.gov, 2019), but has not been ratified as of February 2021.

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 4 women (36.4%) and nearly 1 in 10 men (33.6%) have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2018, p.7).

The most recent report of the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 18.3% of women and 8.2% 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; 30.6% of women and 31.0% of men experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner; and 10.4% of women and 2.2% of men have been a victim of stalking by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2018, pp. 8-9).

In 2017, intimate partner violence was a precipitating factor in 40.5% (856) of homicides among females but only 4.5% (526) among males (Petrosky, et al., 2020). In 2018 “63% (1,014) of female homicide victims were wives or intimate acquaintances of their killers” (Violence Policy Center, 2020, p.3).

Children are also at risk. “[I]n homes where violence between partners occurs, there is a 45% to 60% chance of co-occurring child abuse, a rate 15 times higher than the average. Even when they are not physically attacked, children witness 68% to 80% of domestic assaults” (Edwards, 2019).

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 for 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 depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Centers for Disease Control and Preventions [CDC], 2020b). 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, 2020c). 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, 2020c)			

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TEXAS

The 2019 Texas Crime Report cited 196,902 incidents of family violence in 2019 involving 211,536 victims. 95.4% of those incidents were assaults. IPV made up 27.3% of family violence in Texas (Texas Department of Public Safety [DPS], 2021).

In 2019, 150 women in Texas were killed by their male intimate partners, 11 of whom lived in the KCF counties of interest (11 in Bexar, none occurred during 2019 in the other KCF counties of interest). IPV is not limited to women. There were 31 men killed by their female partners in 2019, 1 of whom lived in Bexar County. Same-sex couples also experience partner violence and 2019 saw one

woman and three men killed by their partners (one of which occurred in the KCF counties of interest) (Texas Council on Family Violence [TCFV], 2020).

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

It has long been known that experiences affect brain development in children. “When a child experiences extreme, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity (e.g., abuse, neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, family economic hardship) without adequate adult support, a toxic stress response can be triggered in the body and impair the child’s development, with lifelong effects on learning, behavior, and health” (Center on the Developing Child, 2019).

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.1). Texas statutes currently do not address what circumstances constitute witnessing domestic violence by a minor.

According to a report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2018, p.30), 38.3% of all children ages 0-17 had witnessed violence in their lifetime; 24.5% within the past year (2014).

Children who witnessed domestic violence may experience moderate or severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. Symptoms that children may encounter include:

- Reliving the event over and over in thought or in play
- Nightmares and sleep problems
- Becoming very upset when something causes memories of the event
- Lack of positive emotions
- Intense ongoing fear or sadness
- Irritability and angry outbursts

- Constantly looking for possible threats, being easily startled
- Acting helpless, hopeless or withdrawn
- Denying that the event happened or feeling numb
- Avoiding places or people associated with the event

(CDC, 2020a)

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 report published for the National Center for Juvenile Justice (Sickmund and Puzzanchera, 2014) stated 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 Puzzanchera, 2014, p.36)

A recent study reported that the deleterious effects of childhood adverse experiences (such as witnessing violence) can have a cumulative impact and affect children for a lifetime. Children experiencing four or more incidents are “more likely to report high school non-completion and household poverty” (Metzler, et al., 2017) as well as periods of unemployment as adults.

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. The syndrome describes a pattern of psychological and behavioral symptoms found in women living in abusive relationships (Walker, 2011). Common symptoms include:

- Anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation
- Embarrassment and fear of judgement
- Belief that the person they love will change
- Emotional withdrawal from family and friends
- Denial (that anything is wrong)
- Excusing the abuser

(Villines, 2018)

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)

Abuse often occurs in cycles, adding to the difficulty for women. The cycle consists of:

- *Tension building* – causing low-level conflict
- *Battering phase* – the tension grows, culminating in abuse which may become more severe as time goes on
- *Honeymoon phase* – where the abuser attempts to win back their partner’s trust and affection

“On average, a person who leaves an abusive relationship will do so seven times before they make the final break” (Villines, 2018).

FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

There are 147 organizations in Texas that provide domestic violence services (Domestic Shelters, 2021). 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

A Single Day of Texas Domestic Violence

“On September 12, 2019, 88 out of 88 (100%) identified domestic violence programs in Texas participated in the National Census of Domestic Violence Services” (National Network to End Domestic Violence [NNEDV], 2020.) The services provided in that 24-hour period included:

- 6,437 victims served
 - 4,160 provided with emergency shelter or other transitional housing
 - 2,277 adults and children provided with non-residential assistance
 - Counseling
 - Legal advocacy
 - Children’s support groups
- 1,724 domestic violence Hotline calls
- 3,727 individuals attended 155 education/training sessions

Unfortunately, the need for domestic violence services exceeds the availability of services, especially for shelter. In one day alone, 1,417 requests for services were unmet— 77% of which were for housing (NNEDV, 2020).

In the KCF counties of interest, there are three primary organizations that provide both residential and non-residential domestic violence services (not a comprehensive list):

- 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, 2021)

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, 2019; FVPS, 2019)

The City of San Antonio (COSA) released a comprehensive plan to address domestic violence in October 2019. After extensive research, gaps in services were identified and a Five-Year Plan was developed which mixes “both immediate solutions to issues that need to be addressed today with strategies that will take many years to fully demonstrate results” (COSA, 2019, p.5). Six primary goals were identified, each with annual indicators and five-year outcome measurements:

1. *Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence* – includes increasing the number of programs that provide parenting and child abuse prevention education
2. *Teach safe and healthy relationship skills* – includes implementing youth violence prevention programs in schools
3. *Increase cross-sector partnerships and transparency* – includes domestic violence

related organization developing strong collaborative partnership with shared outcomes

4. *Coordinate and streamline access to services and trauma-informed response systems* – includes centralized referral/entry point participation
5. *Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms* – includes housing legal, and job training services
6. *Reduce access to weapons and increase availability of rehabilitative programs* – includes offender intervention programs (COSA, 2019)

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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