

Intimate Partner and Family Violence

Introduction

Intimate partner violence is defined as physical, emotional, or verbal abuse; forced isolation; threats; or intimidation occurring between current or former spouses, dating heterosexual couples, and those in gay or lesbian relationships. The common element in all abusive relationships is the abuser's need for power and control over his or her partner.

Since intimate partner violence typically occurs within the privacy of the home, it often goes unreported. However, the [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ncvs95p.htm) (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ncvs95p.htm) estimates that about one million violent crimes were committed against persons by their current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends in 1998. Women tend to be the primary victim in intimate partner violence, and in 1998 the NCVS reported that 85 percent of all victims of this form of violence were women.

Intimate partner violence touches everyone in a family. Studies show that children who witness violence at home experience behavioral problems and increased aggression, have less developed social and conflict resolution skills, and may suffer long-term developmental effects. These youth are also at risk of engaging in future violence and of being abused themselves. Researchers have found that people who batter their partners are also more likely to abuse their children.

Dating violence and sexual assault are particularly prevalent forms of intimate partner violence among adolescents and college-aged youth and also tend to go unreported.

Overview

Intimate partner violence includes physical, emotional, or verbal abuse; forced isolation; threats; or intimidation between current or former spouses, dating heterosexual couples, and those in gay and lesbian relationships. The [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ncvs95p.htm) gathers data about such crimes using an ongoing, nationally representative sample of households in the United States. In 1998, the NCVS identified more than one million victims of intimate partner violence, a rate of 466 per 100,000. However, the actual prevalence of this type of violence is likely higher as much intimate partner violence goes unreported. Between 1993 and 1998, the Bureau of Justice estimates that only about half of all victims reported cases to law enforcement authorities.¹

Women are the victims of intimate partner violence at a rate of nearly five times that of men, and in 1998 the NCVS found that women comprised nearly 85 percent of all intimate partner victimizations in the United States. While the overall rates for this type of violence against women dropped between 1993 and 1998, intimate partner violence accounted for 22 percent of all violent acts against women during this five year period. By contrast, only three percent of violent acts against men during this

Stop youth violence before it starts

timeframe were committed by an intimate partner. Women aged 16-34 experienced the highest rates of intimate violence. Those victimized most frequently were women between the ages of 20 and 24.

Physical assault and battery are the most common forms of intimate partner abuse, and in 1998 65 percent of all reported incidents fell into this category. Other forms of intimate partner violence captured by NCVS include aggravated assault, robbery, rape/sexual assault, and murder. During 1998, 18 percent of reported cases of intimate partner violence were classified as aggravated assault, 10 percent were robbery, and six percent were rape/sexual assault. While only two percent of all intimate partner violent acts committed in 1998 were lethal, intimate partner homicides accounted for 11 percent of all murders and 30 percent of female murders nationwide.

While intimate partner violence crosses racial, cultural, and socioeconomic lines, the NCVS reports that between 1993 and 1998, higher rates of intimate partner victimization occurred among women with lower annual incomes and those living in urban areas. Black women were victimized by intimate partners at a rate 35 percent higher than that of white females, and more than two times the rate of women of other races. However, white women tend to under-report the prevalence of intimate partner violence so the rates for Black women may be over represented. There was no perceptible difference in intimate partner victimization rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic persons. Higher rates of intimate partner violence are experienced by divorced or separated persons across gender lines. Significantly, about four in 10 female victims of intimate partner violence lived in households with children under the age of 12.

Contributing Factors

Chronic alcohol abuse, high levels of marital conflict, and a lack of communications skills are factors that have been associated with intimate partner violence. At the environmental level, access to a range of systems (including victim support, social services, and legal and law enforcement) that can provide resources and guidance may not be available or sufficient. Societal norms that reinforce male dominance and violence as an acceptable problem-solving strategy and means of control also play a role as do community and family dynamics that may not hold the abuser accountable for his or her actions.

The common element in every incident of intimate partner violence, however, is the abuser's need and sense of entitlement for power and control in the relationship. Often this need for control stems from either witnessing or directly experiencing violence in the home as an adolescent or a child, which is one of the risk factors most consistently identified with the perpetration of intimate partner abuse in the future.²

Children Witnessing of Violence

Of the 22.3 million adolescents ages 12-17 in the United States today, approximately 1.8 million have been victims of a serious sexual assault, 3.9 million have been victims of a serious physical assault, and almost nine million have witnessed serious violence.³ These youth have recently become the center of much research and attention in an attempt to understand the impact, implications, and risk related to witnessing and experiencing violence in the home. A review of 31 studies related to children witnessing violence revealed strong evidence that children who witness violence at home exhibit a variety of behavioral, emotional, cognitive and longer-term developmental problems and may see violence as a viable solution for resolving conflicts and exerting power.⁴

In general this meta-analysis found that boys who have witnessed violence or who have experienced it directly tend to exhibit more frequent problems that are outwardly expressed or "external," such as hostility and aggression. Girls, on the other hand, generally show evidence of more internalized problems, such as depression and somatic complaints. However, there are also findings that dissent from this general trend by showing that girls, especially as they get older, also exhibit more aggressive behaviors.

Children who live in a home where intimate partner violence is present are also at risk of abuse themselves. Researchers have found that individuals who batter their partner are also more likely to batter their children. Not surprisingly, the combination of being abused and witnessing violence appears to be associated with more serious problems for children than witnessing violence alone.

Dating Violence

Violence between individuals in a dating or courtship relationship is particularly prevalent among younger individuals. This form of violence encompasses sexual assault, rape, physical assault and battery, and verbal and emotional abuse. Because studies and surveys of this type of violence use different methods and definitions and the vast majority of incidents go unreported, estimates vary on the extent and reach of the problem.

The average frequency of nonsexual dating violence (excluding sexual assault and rape) is approximately 22 percent among male and female high school students and 32 percent among college students.⁵ Further, a 1995 NCVS report found that nearly half of the estimated 500,000 sexual assaults reported annually to the police were committed by friends or acquaintances.⁶ Adolescent girls and young women are four times as likely to be victims of sexual assault than females of other ages, and the vast majority of those crimes are committed by someone the female knows.⁷

Some of the characteristics that increase vulnerability and risk for date rape and violence among female adolescents and young adults include: younger age at first date; early sexual activity; earlier age of menarche; a past history of sexual abuse or prior sexual victimization; and being more accepting of rape myths and violence against women.⁸ Alcohol and other drug use are also positively correlated with the prevalence of violence in dating relationships.

Factors associated with male perpetration of sexual assault include: having sexually aggressive peers; heavy alcohol or drug use; acceptance of dating violence; the male's assumption of key roles in dating such as initiating the date, being the driver, and paying dating expenses; miscommunication about sex; previous sexual intimacy with the victim; interpersonal violence; traditional gender roles; adversarial attitudes about relationships; and belief in rape myths.⁹

Publications

[U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES](http://www.dhhs.gov)

www.dhhs.gov

- [Experts Assess Links Between Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence](http://www.samhsa.gov/press/980121t.html)
www.samhsa.gov/press/980121t.html
Treatment in Protocol Series, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, January 1998.

- [Fact Sheet on Dating Violence](#)
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/datviol.htm
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 1999.
- [Fact Sheet on Male Batterers](#)
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/malebat.htm
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January, 2000.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

www.usdoj.gov

- [Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence](#)
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ipv.htm
C. Rennison and S. Welchans, NCVS Report, NCJ 178247, May 2000.
- [The Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization](#)
www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/fs000179.txt
D. Kilpatrick and B. Saunders, National Institutes of Justice Research Preview, US Department of Justice, April 1997.
- [Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing of Domestic Violence](#)
www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/vawnet/witness/witness.html
J. Edleson, Violence Against Women Online Resources, Department of Justice, April 1999.
- [Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey](#)
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/ascii/femvied.txt
R. Bachman and L. Saltzman, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCVS Report, NCJ 154348, August 1995.

Federal Response and Resources

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

www.ed.gov

- [Report on School Safety](#)
www.ed.gov/pubs/AnnSchoolRept98
The U.S. Department of Education's Report on School Safety, completed in 1998, presents the scope and nature of school crime and safety in the US, describes the steps that communities can take to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce school crime and violence, presents summary information on model programs, and lists resources for more information on school crime and violence. As part of the discussion on model programs a number of sexual harassment and sexual violence prevention programs are described.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

www.dhhs.gov

- **Administration for Children and Families - Family Violence Prevention and Services Act**

www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/opa/facts/domsvio.htm

Through the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is responsible for several activities which address domestic violence, including:

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE**

A nationwide, 24-hour, toll-free domestic violence hotline. The number is 1-800-799-SAFE and the TDD number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-787-3224. Help is also available to callers in Spanish, as well as to other non-English speakers. The hotline provides immediate crisis intervention for those in need. Callers can receive counseling and be referred directly to help in their communities, including emergency services and shelters. Also, operators can offer information and referrals, counseling and assistance in reporting abuse to survivors of domestic violence, family members, neighbors, and the general public. HHS' [Administration for Children and Families](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) contribute funding for the hotline.

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Family and Intimate Violence Prevention Program**

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/fivp/page1.htm

Initially established in 1994, and three years later, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) received \$14.3 million to focus on violence against women. Activities are directed toward five core areas: surveillance, research, evaluation, communication, and training.

First, CDC is working to develop monitoring systems that will inform the public how often family and intimate violence occurs, who faces the greatest risk, and whether the problem is improving or worsening over time at national or local levels. Second, CDC is supporting prevention-oriented research that will lead to greater knowledge of modifiable risk factors and consequences associated with family and intimate violence and the development of new prevention strategies. Third, CDC is undertaking activities to determine how effective specific interventions are in preventing family and intimate violence and how to combine specific interventions into effective programs. Fourth, CDC is supporting public awareness activities to increase societal recognition that family and intimate violence is unacceptable and that all individuals can take steps to prevent it. Finally, CDC supports professional training and education to identify, treat, and refer victims of family and intimate violence.

- **[Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention](#)**

www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Another part of the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) whose mission is to provide national leadership in the Federal effort to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug problems. These problems are intrinsically linked to other serious national problems, including crime and violence. CSAP connects people and resources to innovative ideas and strategies, and encourages efforts to reduce and eliminate alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug problems both in the United States and internationally. CSAP fosters the development of comprehensive, culturally appropriate prevention policies and systems that are based on scientifically defensible principles and target both individuals and the environments in which they live. CSAP participates in the development of new knowledge about prevention, disseminates it in a "user friendly" manner, and encourages its application in settings where it is likely to prevent or reduce substance abuse. One example of the work CSAP does related to intimate partner violence is the publication of a resource guide that presents the data and information available related to violence against women and children who have witnessed violence.

- **[Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment](#)**

www.samhsa.gov/centers/csat2002/csat_frame.html

The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) is part of the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#). SAMHSA is the lead Federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and mental health services in the U.S. CSAT works to close the substance abuse treatment gap by supporting programs that make treatment services more widely available and responsive to locally identified service needs; linking knowledge gained from research with treatment practices; and improving and strengthening substance abuse treatment organizations and systems.

- **[CSAT Treatment Improvement Protocol Series \(TIPs\) I](#)**

www.treatment.org/externals/tips.html

Given the link between substance abuse and intimate partner violence, CSAT supports activities that help treat abusers and their family members and help inform practitioners about this link so that individuals may receive the care they need. CSAT's Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series is a compendium of best practice guides produced for substance abuse service and treatment providers. One volume in this series specifically relates to intimate partner abuse and recommends that providers of treatment services for alcohol and drug abusers and for victims of domestic violence move toward more linked systems of delivering services to provide more effective care. It also provides steps for addressing the two problems of domestic violence and substance abuse together.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

www.usdoj.gov

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics**

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/welcome.html

Collects and maintains data regarding all aspects of violence and the criminal justice system in the United States. The Bureau conducts special analyses on topics of interest such as intimate partner violence. The Bureau is also responsible for managing the National Crime Victimization Survey, an ongoing national household survey providing information about the prevalence and characteristics of victimizations across the country.

- **National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

www.ncjrs.org

A federally-sponsored information clearinghouse for people around the country and the world involved with research, policy, and practice related to criminal and juvenile justice and drug control. It includes publications, grant announcements, policy papers and other relevant documents related to violence and criminal justice.

- **Office of Justice Programs, Violence Against Women Office**

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo

Created as part of the U.S. Department of Justice to implement the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and to lead the national effort to stop domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking of women. The Violence Against Women Office operates with the understanding that eradicating crimes of violence against women calls for coordinated community-based responses. The Violence Against Women Office works with victim advocates and law enforcement in developing grant programs that support a wide range of services for women, including: advocacy, emergency shelter, law enforcement protection, and legal aid. Additionally the Violence Against Women Office is leading efforts nationally and abroad to intervene in and prosecute crimes of trafficking in women and children, and is addressing domestic violence issues in international forums.

The Violence Against Women Office works with the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women to prepare public information strategies and materials and to carry out special projects, such as writing an Agenda for the Nation on Violence Against Women, which was released in 2000. The Office also works with other federal agencies, such as the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](http://www.usda.gov/da/shmd/aware.htm), to develop [domestic violence awareness policies and procedures](http://www.usda.gov/da/shmd/aware.htm) (www.usda.gov/da/shmd/aware.htm) for the workplace.

- **Violence Against Women Online Resources**

www.vaw.umn.edu

A cooperative project of the Violence Against Women Office, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse at the University of Minnesota. The site contains a document library with latest research and promising

practices of model programs, an events calendar and related links for criminal justice practitioners, advocates, and social service professionals.

References

¹Callie Marie Rennison, PhD and Sarah Welchans, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence*, National Crime Victimization Survey, May 2000.

²*Fact Sheet on Male Batterers*, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January, 2000.

³Dean Kilpatrick, PhD, and Benjamin Saunders, PhD, *The Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization*, National Institutes of Justice Research Preview, US Department of Justice, April 1997.

⁴Jeffrey Edleson, *Problems Associated with Children's Witnessing of Domestic Violence*, University of Minnesota School of Social Work, Violence Against Women Online Resources, Department of Justice, April 1999.

⁵*Fact Sheet on Dating Violence*, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 1999.

⁶Ronet Bachman, PhD and Linda Saltzman, PhD, *Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, August 1995.

⁷VI Rickert and CM Wiemann, *Date Rape Among Adolescents and Young Adults*, Journal of Pediatric Adolescent Gynecology, November 1998.

⁸VI Rickert and CM Wiemann, *Date Rape Among Adolescents and Young Adults*, Journal of Pediatric Adolescent Gynecology, November 1998.

⁹*Fact Sheet on Dating Violence*, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 1999.

Date of Publication: 2001