

Facts About Domestic Violence

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A LARGE PROBLEM

Domestic violence is the most common crime in America today, affecting three to four million women a year. The Surgeon General's office reports that domestic violence is the leading cause of death among women.

Studies show that:

- More than 50% of women at some time in their lives and more than 33% are battered repeatedly every year.
- Every 18 seconds a woman is beaten
- Nearly 66% of all married women experience physical violence in their marriage.
- Approximately 33% of all women seeking treatment in hospital emergency rooms are there because they are victims of wife-beating.
- Battering is the single major cause of injury to women, exceeding rape, mugging, and auto accidents.
- In more than 60% of cases the battered women's partners had threatened to kill them.
- On average, 10 women a day are killed by their batterers, who for more than 30% of women are their husbands or boyfriends.

THE VICTIMS

- Women and children are the victims of domestic/family violence, which cuts across all economic, educational, racial, and religious lines.
- When mothers are battered, the father is three times more likely to abuse his children.
- Besides being physically abused, children often suffer emotional and psychological trauma from living in homes where their fathers abuse their mothers.
- Children whose mothers are abused are more likely to have stress-related physical ailments, like headaches,

ulcers, and rashes. They often experience depression and anxiety; they may be overly aggressive and difficult to control or they may be unusually passive and withdrawn; and they frequently have problems performing in school and may be held back.

- Children from violent homes live in constant fear of injury to their mothers and themselves. They may feel guilty about loving or hating the abuser, blame themselves for causing the violence, or feel utterly helpless about being unable to stop the violence.
- Even when children do not observe the violence they almost always are aware that it is occurring. Even babies are known to be affected by domestic /family violence.

THE BATTERERS

While there is no single profile of a batterer, male batterers have certain characteristics in common:

- Low self-esteem.
- Extreme need to be controlling.
- Extreme possessiveness and jealousy.
- Belief that his wife has provoked him into battering.
- Feeling of remorse after each attack.
- Ability to swing back and forth between two personalities, one charming, one violent.
- Avowal that he loves his family.
- Belief that the problem can be handled within the family.
- Substance Abuse. Alcohol is involved in at least 60% of domestic abuse cases.

WHY WOMEN STAY

- Risk. research indicates women who leave their batterers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer than those who stay.

- Financial dependence. In the first year after a divorce, a woman's standard of living drops by 73%, while a man's improves by an average of 42%. Many women, especially older ones, are still financially dependent on their husbands and lack marketable skills.
- Fear for children's safety. Women fear for their children's safety or losing custody.
- Cycle of violence. There is a strong cycle in which violence alternates with calm, concern, and renewed hope by the women that "things will get better." Some women also believe that the abusing partner, when remorseful, cannot survive without her.
- Responsibility for the family. Many women feel their role is to maintain peace and to keep the family together. They believe it is their fault if it does not happen.
- Difficulty in getting help. In one study of more than 6,000 shelter women in Texas, the battered women had, on average, contacted five different sources for help prior to leaving home.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

- One third of all calls to police relate to domestic violence.
- Wife-beating is the single most unreported crime in the country. The FBI indicates that only one of 10 incidents is reported. Upper middle class women are less likely to report abuse. Existing statistics are unreliable because many police departments still tabulate domestic violence, except murder, with all domestic disputes, including noisy neighbors and unleashed dogs.
- Police take action in fewer than one out of five incidents, according to one survey. And 13% said they never report domestic violence incidents.

WHAT CAN HELP

- The combination of arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment could stop up to 96% of repeat battering incidents, according to studies by the National Institute of Justice.
- A prominent Minnesota study found that arrest is more effective in preventing further violence than either police mediation or separation of the parties for the night.

- Breaking of silence by community and religious leaders can also be a major factor in solving the problem. A more women recognize they are not alone as victims and the problem is brought into the open, progress will be made.
- Helping agencies, both public and private, are needed to coordinate programs that go beyond providing immediate shelter.
- Judges, clergy, and physicians need to be sensitized to the scope and facts of domestic violence.

SHELTERS FOR WOMEN & CHILDREN

- There are more than 1,400 shelters and safe homes in the United States, primarily offering temporary refuge and/or relief to the battered woman and her children.
- Most shelters house only 10 to 12 people. In Minnesota, noted for its model programs, as many as 65% of applicants have been turned away for lack of space.
- The average length of stay is four to six weeks, which some believe is too short a time to bring about the kind of psychological change needed to break the cycle of abuse.
- Most shelters are under funded and cannot adequately deal with all the immediate problems—employment, housing, schooling, economic aid, legal assistance, psychological counseling—that women need in this situation face.
- Most shelters are not equipped to help women work on continuance of their relationships without violence. Even with help, significant numbers of women choose to return to their partner.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

The issue of domestic violence is one part of the larger problem of violence against women. As the incidence of violent attacks against women, particularly rape, increases it is incumbent on the courts and on our legislators to provide an effective workable remedy to reverse this trend. *You can help too. Let your legislators know how you feel.*