

Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics

Wednesday 23 February 2011, by [NOW](#) (Date first published: 2008).

Despite the fact that advocacy groups like NOW have worked for two decades to halt the epidemic of gender-based violence and sexual assault, the numbers are still shocking. It is time to renew our national pledge, from the President and Congress on down to City Councils all across the nation to END violence against women and men, girls and boys. This effort must also be carried on in workplaces, schools, churches, locker rooms, the military, and in courtrooms, law enforcement, entertainment and the media. NOW pledges to continue our work to end this violence and we hope you will join us in our work.

MURDER

In 2005, 1,181 women were murdered by an intimate partner.¹ That's an average of three women every day. Of all the women murdered in the U.S., about one-third were killed by an intimate partner.²

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Intimate Partner Violence or Battering)

Domestic violence can be defined as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.³ According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes every year.⁴ Less than 20 percent of battered women sought medical treatment following an injury.⁵

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, which includes crimes that were not reported to the police, 232,960 women in the U.S. were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006. That's more than 600 women every day.⁶ Other estimates, such as those generated by the FBI, are much lower because they rely on data from law enforcement agencies. A significant number of crimes are never even reported for reasons that include the victim's feeling that nothing can/will be done and the personal nature of the incident.⁷

THE TARGETS

Young women, low-income women and some minorities are disproportionately victims of domestic violence and rape. Women ages 20-24 are at greatest risk of nonfatal domestic violence⁸, and women age 24 and under suffer from the highest rates of rape.⁹ The Justice Department estimates that one in five women will experience rape or attempted rape during their college years, and that less than five percent of these rapes will be reported.¹⁰ Income is also a factor: the poorer the household, the higher the rate of domestic violence — with women in the lowest income category experiencing more than six times the rate of nonfatal intimate partner violence as compared to women in the highest income category.¹¹ When we consider race, we see that African-American women face higher rates of domestic violence than white women, and American-Indian women are

victimized at a rate more than double that of women of other races.¹²

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, “growing up in a violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child’s life, growth and development. . . . children who have been exposed to family violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and were at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu.” In addition, women who experience physical abuse as children are at a greater risk of victimization as adults, and men have a far greater (more than double) likelihood of perpetrating abuse. ¹³

IMPACT ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that the cost of domestic violence in 2003 was more than over \$8.3 billion. This cost includes medical care, mental health services, and lost productivity. ¹⁴

LEGISLATION

In 1994, the National Organization for Women, the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now called Legal Momentum), the Feminist Majority and other organizations finally secured passage of the Violence Against Women Act, which provided a record-breaking \$1.6 billion to address issues of violence against women.¹⁵ However it took nearly an additional year to force the Newt Gingrich-led Congress to release the funding. An analysis estimated that in the first six years after VAWA was passed, nearly \$14.8 billion was saved in net averted social costs.¹⁶ VAWA was reauthorized in 2005, with nearly \$4 billion in funding over five years.¹⁷

VIOLENCE BETWEEN SAME-SEX COUPLES

According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, “domestic violence affecting LGBT individuals continues to be grossly underreported . . . there is a lack of awareness and denial about the existence of this type of violence and its impact, both by LGBT people and non-LGBT people alike.”¹⁸

Myths regarding gender roles perpetuate the silence surrounding these abusive relationships; for example, the belief that there aren’t abusive lesbian relationships because women don’t abuse each other. Shelters are often unequipped to handle the needs of lesbians (as a women-only shelter isn’t much defense against a female abuser), and transgendered individuals. Statistics regarding domestic violence against LGBT people are unavailable at the national level, but as regional studies demonstrate, domestic violence is as much a problem within LGBT communities as it is among heterosexual ones.¹⁹

RESOURCES

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2. Bureau of Justice Statistics, There has been a decline in homicide of intimates, especially male victims
3. Department of Justice, About Domestic Violence
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Understanding Intimate Partner Violence (PDF)

5. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), Domestic Violence Facts (PDF)
6. Bureau of Justice Statistics (table 2, page 15), Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2006 Statistical Tables
7. US Census Bureau (page 12), National Crime Victimization Survey (PDF)
8. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Victim Characteristics: Age
9. Bureau of Justice Statistics (table 4, page 17) Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2006 Statistical Tables (PDF)
10. National Institute of Justice (pages 6-7), Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities Are Doing About It (PDF)
11. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S.: Victims
12. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Victim Characteristics: Race
13. Family Violence Prevention Fund, The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence
14. CDC, Understanding Intimate Partner Violence (PDF)
15. NOW, The Violence Against Women Act: Celebrating 10 Years of Prevention
16. University of North Carolina, Analyses of Violence Against Women Act suggest legislation saved U.S. \$14.8 billion
17. NCADV, Comparison of VAWA 1994, VAWA 2000 and VAWA 2005 Reauthorization Bill (PDF)
18. National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Domestic Violence In the United States in 2007 (PDF)
19. NCAVP, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Domestic Violence In the United States in 2007 (PDF)

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* Frm NOW:

<http://www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html>