

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a broad concept that refers to a wide range of acts, including:

- Murder
- Rape
- Sexual assault
- Emotional abuse
- Battering
- Stalking
- Prostitution
- Genital mutilation
- Sexual harassment
- Pornography¹

There is no one profile of a survivor of violence. Because three out of four women in America will be victims of a violent crime, few are immune to this problem.² Women who experience violence come from every racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and age group.

Perpetrators can be strangers but most often are familiar to victims. Cultural and societal norms often perpetuate and justify this violence by supporting abuse and control of women in intimate relationships. The exact prevalence of violence against women cannot be calculated. Incidents often go unreported, inconsistencies exist in reporting, and difficulties are encountered in collecting data.¹

The need for the prevention of violence against women is evident when reviewing the following facts:

- About 85 percent of victimizations by intimate partners in 1998 (about 876,340) were against women.³
- In 1998 intimate partner homicides accounted for about 11 percent of all murders nationwide.³
- Women are significantly more likely than men to be injured during an assault.³
- Women ages 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rates of sexual assault.³
- Women are more likely than men to be murdered in the context of intimate partner violence. In 1998, 32 percent of all female homicide victims were murdered by an intimate partner. In contrast, 4 percent of male murder victims were killed by an intimate partner.⁴
- Higher rates of intimate partner victimization are associated with:
 - Being African American
 - Being young
 - Being divorced or separated
 - Earning lower incomes
 - Living in rental housing
 - Living in an urban area³

Just as there is no one profile of survivors of violence, perpetrators also vary. Perpetrators of violence against women are usually men, accounting for three-quarters of violent crimes against women. However, woman-on-woman violence also occurs, especially in lesbian relationships.⁵

The Connection Between Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women

The use of substances can provoke or increase the severity of violence.² Higher rates of substance abuse correlate with higher rates of domestic violence. Other factors correlated with domestic violence include:

- Low income
- Unemployment
- Depression
- Poor family ties
- Lack of a stable home
- Societal norms⁶

Many perpetrators use substances before committing a violent act. However, in incidents of domestic violence, the use of alcohol and other drugs by either partner is a risk factor for partner abuse.⁷ In addition:

- Substance abusers are more likely to attack partners sexually and to be violent outside the home compared with non-substance abusers.⁸
- Studies have shown that more than half of defendants accused of murdering their spouses had been drinking alcohol at the time the murder occurred.²
- Men's drinking patterns, especially binge drinking, are associated with marital violence across all ethnic and social classes.⁹
- Researchers have found that one-fourth to one-half of men who commit acts of domestic violence have substance abuse problems.¹⁰
- Chronic use of alcohol is a better predictor of battering than acute intoxication.¹¹
- A large percentage of convicted batterers were raised by parents who abused drugs or alcohol.²

The linkage of alcohol and drugs to violence extends to survivors as well. Women who abuse alcohol and other drugs are more likely to be victims of domestic violence. Habitual use of alcohol is associated with the increased likelihood of sexual victimization.¹² Alcohol has been shown to impair cognitive and motor skills, thus preventing women from recognizing, escaping, or resisting sexual aggression.¹³

Drinking also can increase the likelihood of victimization by placing women in settings where the chances are greater of encountering an offender.¹ Also, victims of domestic violence are more likely to self-medicate against fear and to relieve stress. Other evidence linking substance abuse to victims of violence follows:

- Domestic violence victims are more likely to receive prescriptions for, and become dependent on, tranquilizers, sedatives, stimulants, and painkillers.¹³
- Women presenting to physicians with depression or alcohol or drug addiction often

- have a history of violence committed against them.¹³
- The most common pattern of drinking related to domestic violence is that involving use by both offender and victim.¹⁴

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