

## THE IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

More than ten million people in the U.S. are abused by their partners each year. One in four women will be punched, slapped, burned, kicked, strangled, or otherwise beaten by an intimate partner during her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Worse yet, as is described below, much of the harm resulting from this violence might not be so readily apparent.

For the past three decades, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has been collecting and publishing data and findings on the impacts of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>

The impacts listed below are a summary of these CDC findings. Additional citations corroborating these findings are also provided.

A. **PHYSICAL IMPACTS:** Outside of the health conditions typically associated with physical violence (i.e., bruises, abrasions, broken bones, etc.),<sup>3</sup> domestic violence can cause:

### 1. Deaths:

- Each day in the U.S., three women are murdered by current or former intimate partners.<sup>4</sup> The number of deaths due to intimate partner violence does not include those women who kill themselves to exit violent relationships, or who die homeless on the streets to avoid batterers.<sup>5</sup>
- 1 in 5 homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner. Over half of female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by a current or former male intimate partner.<sup>6</sup> Homicide is a leading cause of death for women under 40.<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Neurological Problems:

- stroke (hemorrhagic stroke can be caused by high blood pressure due to stress); [DV VICTIMS ARE 80% MORE LIKELY THAN NON-VICTIMS TO HAVE STROKES.<sup>8</sup>]
- chronic pain (both through repeated physical injuries and indirectly from long term stress);
- speech problems (such as stuttering, potentially through head trauma or as a result from anxiety);
- migraines/headaches (through anxiety, depression, distress, or from traumatic brain injuries);
- central nervous system problems (immune system can be suppressed by stress from domestic violence; moreover, there is a link between stress and the onset of cancer);
- back pain (from injuries, tense muscles due to stress);
- traumatic brain injury (from being struck);

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<sup>1</sup> Tjaden, P., and Thoennes, N., *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women; Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey*, U.S. Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Risks and Protection Factors for Perpetration*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021). *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017). *Adverse Health Conditions and Health Risk Behaviors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2008). *Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*, U.S. Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Conditions & Injuries Related to Domestic Violence; Effects of violence against women; and Health consequences. Adverse Health Conditions and Health Risk Behaviors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's webpage (2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Intimate Partner Violence: Attributes of Victimization, 1993-2011*, Bureau of Justice Statistics (November, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Fox, J.A. and Zawitz, M.W., *Homicide Trends in the United States*, U.S. Department of Justice, *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (January, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> *Fast Facts: What Is Intimate Partner Violence?*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>7</sup> Petrosky, E., *Racial and Ethnic Differences in Homicides of Adult Women and the Role of Intimate Partner Violence – United States, 2003-2014, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (July 21, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> See Footnote 2 - "Adverse Health Conditions" article.

- hemorrhaging (regular aspirin use to treat physical pain from domestic violence is associated with hemorrhage problems);
- high blood pressure from stress can activate one's nervous system "flight or fight" response);
- vision impairment (patients have been noted to have more than a 20% reduction in their vision due to stress or mood; serious head injuries can also temporarily or permanently affect vision);
- fibromyalgia.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Cardiovascular and Respiratory Problems:

- heart disease (social isolation, lack of social support, and depression have been shown to cause and worsen heart disease); [DV VICTIMS ARE 70% MORE LIKELY THAN NON-VICTIMS TO HAVE HEART DISEASE.<sup>10</sup>]
- asthma (psychological dysfunction from consistent exposure to trauma is correlated with asthma development and agitation); [DV VICTIMS ARE 60% MORE LIKELY THAN NON-VICTIMS TO HAVE ASTHMA.<sup>11</sup>]
- heart attack;
- hypertension (symptoms like stress, depression, anxiety, and panic disorders can all severely deteriorate the heart's condition);
- chest pain (trauma and PTSD from domestic violence can increase metabolic syndromes and cardiovascular risk factors that lead to chest pain);
- hyperventilation (acute stress, PTSD, and panic disorders from domestic violence can present as physical symptoms in hyperventilation).<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Intestinal and Digestive Problems:

- gastrointestinal issues (can be caused by stress and disruptions in life patterns);
- stomach ulcers (physical stress can increase chances of development);
- spastic color/indigestion/diarrhea (caused by stress);
- irritable bowel syndrome;
- abdominal pain (mental stress caused by threats or worry can affect nutrient absorption, decreased oxygenation, less blood flow, and decreased enzymatic output).<sup>13</sup>

### 5. Reproductive and Genital Problems:

- sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS) [DV VICTIMS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY AS NON-VICTIMS TO CONTRACT STDs<sup>14</sup> as they are often unable to demand fidelity or condom use, or to refrain from sexual activity with their partner for fear of further abuse];
- cervical cancer (when there has been sexual or physical violence);
- dysmenorrhea (those with stress are twice as likely to develop);
- vaginal bleeding/tearing (sexual assault can lead to significant vaginal injuries);
- urinary tract infections (due to sexual assaults);
- anal bleeding/tearing (from rough or unwanted anal contact);
- poor pregnancy outcomes, specifically:
- stress affecting newborn child, such as low birth weight, preterm delivery;
- stress affecting the mother, such as antepartum hemorrhaging and intrauterine growth restrictions, which can be fatal to the child; abuse during pregnancy can cause perinatal death and preterm deliveries;

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<sup>9</sup> See Footnote 2.

<sup>10</sup> See Footnote 3 - "Adverse Health Conditions" article.

<sup>11</sup> See Footnote 3 - "Adverse Health Conditions" article.

<sup>12</sup> See Footnote 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Footnote 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Footnote 3 - "Conditions and Injuries" article.

- the physical impact of a violent act can also cause perinatal death and preterm deliveries.<sup>15</sup>

**B. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS:** Domestic violence can have a profound effect on the emotional well-being of the victim, causing:

- alcohol and drug abuse (used to escape feelings of pain, to not recognize abuse, to forget memories of past trauma; substances can also be forced upon victims); [DV VICTIMS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY AS NON-VICTIMS TO HAVE AN ALCOHOL USE DISORDER.<sup>16</sup>]
- depression (from feelings of loss of control, low self esteem, fear for one's life as well as being isolated, controlled and injured by partners);
- suicidal ideations and behaviors (caused by depression and feelings of hopelessness, causing desperation);
- post-traumatic stress disorder (caused by traumatic events that continue to cause pain and fear - the intensity, duration and perception of abuse is significant);
- anxiety (caused by physical, sexual, or psychological abuse);
- chronic and acute stress (can be caused by loss of control and fear);
- sleep disturbances;
- emotional detachment;
- repeat victimization and greater risk for victims' becoming abusers themselves.<sup>17</sup>

**C. IMPACTS ON CHILDREN:** Exposure to domestic violence can have a serious impact on children in that there will be a greater likelihood of:

1. **Actual Physical Victimization:** Those children in homes where there is domestic violence against parents/caregivers are fifteen times more likely to be victims of physical abuse themselves than those children in homes without domestic violence.<sup>18</sup>
2. **Emotional Trauma:** Those children who witness their parents' abuse often face considerable emotional trauma.<sup>19</sup> Childhood exposure to domestic violence often causes:
  - increased displays of aggressive behavior;
  - increased emotional problems (such as depression and/or anxiety);
  - hyperarousal;
  - avoidance and withdrawal;
  - sleeping challenges, nightmares;
  - lower levels of social competence;
  - poorer academic functioning;
  - lower I.Q. scores;
  - exhibition of the same levels of post-traumatic stress disorder as those children who had been direct victims of physical abuse.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See Footnote 2; *Early Life Exposure to Violence: Developmental Consequences on Brain and Behavior - PMC* (2019).

<sup>16</sup> See Footnote 3 – “Conditions and Injuries” article.

<sup>17</sup> See Footnote 2; Choe, Jeanne Y. et al., *Perpetration of Violence, Violent Victimization, and Severe Mental Illness; Balancing Public Health Concerns*, 59 *Psychiatr. Serv.* 153. (2008). Iratzoqui, A., *Strain and Opportunity: A Theory of Repeat Victimization, and Severe Mental Illness*.

<sup>18</sup> Edleson, J.L., Ellerton, A.L., et al., *Assessing Child Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(7), 961-971 (2007); Osofsky, J.D., *The Impact of Violence on Children*, *The Future of Children: Domestic Violence and Children* (1999).

<sup>19</sup> Fantuzzo, J.W. & Mohr, W.K., *Prevalence and Effects of Child Exposure to Domestic Violence*, *The Future of Children* (1999). *Witnessing Domestic Violence: The Effect on Children | AAFP* (2002) *Long Term Physical Health Consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences - PMC* (2015); *Domestic Violence and Children* (2017).

<sup>20</sup> See also “Psychological Impacts” for Adults, Section 2B, as many of the impacts ultimately become apparent.

3. **Abnormal Brain Development:** The stress caused from exposure to domestic violence can actually cause chemical changes in a child's brain which can severely disrupt or alter the brain's development.<sup>21</sup> When this happens, the processes of brain development and growth shift to "preservation and survival."<sup>22</sup> Specifically, extreme stress can:
  - alter the development of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (the brain's stress response system) due to increased levels of stress hormones. The stress can also create a hyper-responsive amygdala (the brain region central to emotion). These neural changes can cause the child to be more anxious, aggressive, hypervigilant and prone to avoidance;<sup>23</sup>
  - shrink the hippocampus (the key brain region for memory formation) by killing its neurons, thereby negatively affecting the child's memory, perhaps permanently;<sup>24</sup>
  - disconnect the prefrontal cortex (which plays a central role in cognitive control formation) from the rest of the brain, making it more difficult for the child to focus, learn, and act appropriately, especially in stressful situations.<sup>25</sup>
4. **Adult Criminal Behavior and Victimization:** As a result of the mentioned emotional trauma and brain development, children who have been exposed to domestic violence will be more prone to commit such acts themselves or become actual victims by other offenders. Alarming, the best predictor of whether children will eventually become either perpetrators or victims is if they grew up in a home with domestic violence.<sup>26</sup>

There are some significant gender-specific psychological effects on children. According to a 2006 UNICEF Report:

**Boys** who witness their mothers' abuse are ten times more likely (than boys who do not witness DV) to be perpetrators themselves.<sup>27</sup>

**Girls** who grow up in homes where their fathers abuse their mothers are six times more likely to be sexually abused than girls who grew up in nonabusive homes.<sup>28</sup>

- D. **FINANCIAL IMPACTS:** Domestic violence greatly impacts the costs of medical care and costs stemming from missed working days.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the cost of domestic violence over a victim's lifetime was \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lehman, C., *Abuse Said to Interfere with Child Brain Development*, *Psychiatric News*, 37(1), 23 (2004); *The Neurobiology of Child Abuse*, [Training and Research Institute](#) (2004); Shimbun, T.Y., *Study: Witnessing Abuse Affects Brain*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (April 26, 2010); *Early Life Exposure to Violence: Developmental Consequences on Brain and Behavior - PMC* (2019); *Child-Witnessed Domestic Violence and its Adverse Effects on Brain Development: A Call for Societal Self-Examination and Awareness* (2014); *The startling toll on children who witness domestic violence is just now being understood* (2021).

<sup>22</sup> Kavanaugh, B.C., Dupont-Frechette, B.A., et al., *Neurocognitive Deficits in Children and Adolescents Following Maltreatment: Neurodevelopmental Consequences and Neuropsychological Implications of Traumatic Stress*, *Applied Neuropsychology: Child*, 6:1, 64-78 (2017).

<sup>23</sup> Footnote 22 and McCrory, E.J., DeBrito, S.A., et al., *Heightened Neural Reactivity to Threat in Child Victims of Family Violence*, *Current Biology Magazine*, Vol.21 No. 23 (2011).

<sup>24</sup> Footnote 23.

<sup>25</sup> Hart, H., Lim, L., Mehta, M.A., et al., *Reduced Functional Connectivity of Frontoparietal Sustained Attention Networks in Severe Childhood Abuse*, *PLoS One*, 12(11) (2017).

<sup>26</sup> *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*; [The 2006 UNICEF Report](#); *Startling Statistics*, *Break the Cycle*, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> [The 2006 UNICEF Report](#); Straus and Gelles, *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence...*, 1990). Straus and Gelles indicate that a boy who witnesses DV (not necessarily of his mother) is twice as likely to be a perpetrator.

<sup>28</sup> [The 2006 UNICEF Report](#). See also Davis, J. & Briggs, E., National Violence against Women Prevention Center (2003).

<sup>29</sup> [Opinion | The cost of domestic violence is astonishing - The Washington Post](#); [story.html lifetime Economic Burden of Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Adults - PMC](#) ;

Economic costs that were included were those associated with medical services, lost productivity from paid work, criminal justice, and other miscellaneous costs.<sup>30</sup> The annual total cost of domestic violence each year in the United States was determined to be an astounding \$3.6 trillion.<sup>31</sup>

Victims of intimate partner violence lost nearly 8 million days of paid work each year because of the violence perpetrated against them by current or former intimate partners. This loss is the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs and almost 5.6 million days of household productivity as a result of violence.<sup>32</sup>

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The Economic Cost of Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking;

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiagermano/2019/10/17/domestic-violence-has-a-financial-impact-too/?sh=405577be9d04>

<sup>30</sup> Costs could include the costs for seeking safety, replacing/repairing damaged property, moving expenses, child care, moving, counseling, “criminal justice system interventions,” seeking employment, pain and suffering, attorneys’ fees...

<sup>31</sup> The 2006 UNICEF Report.

<sup>32</sup> National Coalition against Domestic Violence & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s webpage.