



Domestic Violence: An Overview

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Introduction

Domestic violence has been described by the Nevada Attorney General's Office "as a violent crime committed in the context of an intimate relationship. It is characterized by acts of violence, power and coercion intended to control another person's behavior" (Nevada Attorney General, 2011). While Domestic Violence (DV), often referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), has both male and female offenders, women are much more likely to be victims of IPV than men (Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence - NNADV, 2010).

The purpose of this publication is to help readers understand the dynamics of IPV, by providing an overview of various forms of control exhibited toward victims. As Nevada notoriously ranks high in reports of IPV, understanding how IPV impacts our communities is crucial in developing strategies to address it. As IPV affects people from all walks of life, non-IPV program developers need to be aware that their clientele/students may be experiencing some form of violence or coercion.

IPV State Ranking

On Sept. 23, 2011 the Violence Policy Center (VPC), a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury, issued a press release stating that Nevada ranked No. 1 in the nation in the rate of women killed by men in single victim/single offender homicides for 2009. In clarifying this report, VPC stated that in 88 percent of the incidents in which the circumstances could be determined, the homicides were not related to any other felony, implying that these incidents were acts of violence deliberately directed at the victim. In reviewing similar statistics for the years

2000-2009, Nevada has ranked as one of the top five states in nine of those 10 years, and as No.1 in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2009. As reported by NNADV, a woman's chances of being assaulted at home, by her partner, are greater than that of a police officer being assaulted on the job.

Obtaining an accurate accounting of IPV incidents is difficult. Often acts of IPV go unreported to either law enforcement or victim advocate agencies. According to the NNADV, approximately 37,000 victims of abuse received services from domestic violence programs in Nevada, based upon data from 12 of Nevada's 17 counties during the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Yet, a report conducted in 2000 by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (USDOJ), National Institute of Justice states most IPV incidents are not reported to the police. This may be due to the nature of IPV; victim's fear of reprisal if the prosecution is not successful (the most dangerous time for the victim is when they try to leave the abuser), victim's history of protecting the offender, perception that nothing will be done if reported, self-shame for failure to leave the relationship earlier, concern over child custody, etc. As victims may make several attempts to leave the offender before they are successful, it is important that those who provide response and support services, as well as the victim's community, be knowledgeable about the impact IPV has on the victim's willingness to seek assistance.

Types of Abuse

Abuse is normally characterized within five main categories: physical, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological (USDOJ, 2011). While different agencies may vary in how they

categorize abuse, they overwhelmingly agree that most victims experience multiple types of abuse. The offender, whether male or female, uses whatever means at his or her disposal to control the victim's behavior.

Physical: As signs of physical abuse can be most obvious (bruises, cuts, broken bones, swelling), it is commonly believed that **all** IPV is manifested through a victim being beaten. While horrific acts of physical violence can occur, it is a misconception that all victims are beaten. Reports of non-homicide physical abuse may include biting, slapping, restraining, shoving, hitting (with or without the use of a weapon), and/or the threat of physical violence. Some victims may not be physically touched, yet the threat of physical assault is so pervasive, that victims fear they will be. Often the threat is directed at individuals other than the victim, such as children or other family members, using the threat of another's harm as leverage for the offender to maintain control. Offenders also use threats against pets to control victim behavior.

Sexual: Sexual abuse is used by offenders to demean and control a victim. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV, 2007) reports that sexual assault or forced sex occurs in approximately 40 to 45 percent of battering relationships. In a June 2009 USDOJ report, it further states that studies indicate that if there is physical abuse in domestic violence, there is probably sexual abuse as well. Forms of sexual abuse include rape (including marital rape), attempted rape, attacks on sexual body parts, requiring the performance of sexual acts, and threats of sexual assault. One in six women and one in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape (NCADV, 2011). Many factors contribute to under-reporting including shame and embarrassment, self-blame, fear of media exposure, fear of further injury or retaliation, and fear of a legal system that often puts the victim's behavior and history on trial (The National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008).

Emotional: An underlying theme within IPV is the intentional destruction of a victim's self-

esteem. Offenders who manipulate a victim's self-worth are more likely to be able to control a victim. Constant criticism, name-calling, and minimizing a victim's abilities, are all methods for emotionally controlling a victim. When a victim feels worthless, they are less likely to believe that they deserve better treatment and, therefore, are more apt to remain in an abusive relationship. According to the USDOJ (2007), in most cases, emotional violence has been preceded by acts or threats of physical or sexual violence. When children are present in the home, the offender may manipulate youth in the demeaning behavior, alienating the victim from his or her own children.

Economic: The objective of financial abuse is to keep the victim dependent upon the offender. Victims may be prohibited from having access to household money or from obtaining employment. Oppressive accountability may be demanded of victims who are given access to funds for purchasing basic necessities; many victims have necessities withheld. Victims are often prevented from opening bank accounts or obtaining credit. Offenders may attempt to cause an employed victim to lose his or her job through harassing behavior at the victim's place of work. According to the NCADV between 35 and 56 percent of victims of IPV are harassed at work by their abuser. Between a quarter and a half report that they have lost a job due to domestic violence.

Psychological: Offenders traumatize victims through intimidation and threats. While offenders threaten and perform physical, financial, sexual and emotional harm to the victim, often the threats are aimed at family members, children, co-workers, friends and pets. The offender isolates the victim from family and friends, so that all basic support must come from the offender, causing the victim to feel incapable of escape. Victims, therefore, yield to offender requirements. According to Mental Health America (2011), survivors of violence acts, including domestic violence, can suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur after an individual has been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something horrible and scary that

one sees or experiences. During this type of event, one may think that his or her life or others' lives are in danger. A person may feel afraid or feel that he or she has no control over what is happening (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD, 2011).

Long Term Effects of IPV

Victims of IPV may suffer emotionally and physically long after their offenders are gone. According to the NNADV, "women who have experienced domestic violence are 80 percent more likely to have a stroke, 70 percent more likely to have heart disease, 60 percent more likely to have asthma and 70 percent more likely to drink heavily than women who have not experienced intimate partner violence." Impacts of IPV male victimization is less understood due to the social stigmas associated with masculinity. However, men suffer similar and just as severe physical injury and negative psychological effects as women (Randle and Graham, 2011) when victims of IPV. While children are often victims to the same types of abuse as adults, they may have long-lasting difficulties as a result of witnessing abuse, with manifestation in adult depression, low self-esteem, and trauma-related symptoms, (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2002). Left untreated, these children have a greater chance of becoming the next generation of victims and offenders (USDOJ, 2011).

Impact of IPV on Communities

Not only do victims and their families and friends suffer as a result of IPV, but so do communities. As stated earlier, offenders want to maintain control over victims, even outside the home. For victims who are employed, this opens up the workplace as a location for unwanted attention from the offender and the potential for violence. It is estimated that 24 percent of all workplace violence is a result of a personal relationship (Workplace Responds to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center, 2010). A clear understanding by employers of IPV is critical so that the victims are not held accountable for offender behavior.

For victims who do not work outside the home, the effect of IPV can also impact other places in the community; businesses, places of worship, locations for entertainment and medical facilities. As the offender is committed to dominating the victim's behavior, efforts to maintain control can be exhibited anywhere. Even when the confrontation is not overt, the victim may act uncooperative or withdrawn so as not to upset the offender.

Notwithstanding the personal impact of IPV to the victim, co-workers, family and friends, the financial cost associated with IPV is enormous. It is reported that for 1995 the cost of IPV exceeded \$5.8 billion each year, \$4.1 billion of which was used for direct medical and mental health services with almost \$1.8 billion in indirect costs of lost productivity in the United States (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). When updated to today's dollars, the cost of IPV rape, physical assault and stalking is more than \$8.3 billion (Workplace Responds to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center, 2010).

Conclusion

That Nevada continues to have some of the highest rates of IPV rates in the nation is a shameful statistic for our state. A quote from Desmond Tutu, an activist for human rights stated: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." From that perspective, every citizen of this state has the responsibility to be aware of domestic violence and the long-term effects of IPV. A first step in changing these alarming statistics is awareness, and the purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of the situation. Subsequent publications will provide readers with strategies and resources that may be useful for friends, neighbors and co-workers who want to help. Please see the Suggested Reading list for further information about Domestic Violence as well as organizations that can provide victims with services and resources in Nevada.

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