

Domestic Violence as a Major Public Health Issue

Prevalence

- **4 million women in America experience a serious assault by an intimate partner during an average year.**
- **Nearly 1 in 3 adult women in America experience at least one physical assault by a partner in adulthood.**

SOURCE: American Psychological Association, "Violence and the Family: Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family" (1996).

Risk Factors

- **The chance of being victimized by an intimate is 10 times greater for a woman than a man.**

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: National Crime Victimization Survey, Violence Against Women (1994).

- **Domestic violence is statistically consistent across racial & ethnic boundaries.**

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey (1995).

Mortality

- **Homicides are the fourth leading cause of death of injury among females of childbearing age**
- **Half of all female homicides are battering-related.**

SOURCE: Dannenberg, et al. "Intentional and Unintentional Injuries in Women: An Overview." Annals of Epidemiology, March 1994.

Morbidity

- **Over 1.5 million women seek medical care each year for injuries related to domestic violence.**
- **20% of female patient ER visits for injury are caused by DV.**

SOURCE: Flitcraft, "Physicians and Domestic Violence: Challenges for Prevention." Health Affairs, Winter 1993.

Battering During Pregnancy

- Between 4-8% women seek are battered at least one time during pregnancy.
- ¼ of pregnant women who were beaten were struck in the abdomen.
- Women assaulted during pregnancy are twice as likely to experience preterm labor, miscarriage or birth defects.

SOURCE: Berenson, et al. "Perinatal Morbidity Associated with Violence Experienced by Pregnant Women." American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, June 1994, Volume 170, No. 6.

Impact on the workplace

- Each physical assault victim averages productivity losses of \$476 per victim.
- Productivity losses per homicide average \$610,000.
- Lifetime costs paid by society for assault victims is estimated at \$96 billion.

SOURCE: Miller, et al. "Victim Costs of Violent Crime and Resulting Injuries," Health Affairs, Winter 1993.

Health Care Costs of Domestic Violence

Each year, DV injuries result in:

- 21,000 hospitalizations
- 99,800 inpatient treatment days
- 28,700 Emergency Room visits
- 39,000 medical office visits.
- Total medical costs exceeding \$44 million

SOURCE: Loring & Smith, "Health Care Barriers and interventions for Battered Women." Public Health Reports, May/June 1994.

"Of all the health and human services challenges we face, perhaps the most devastating, and ironically, most preventable is the epidemic of violence sweeping across this nation."

--Donna Shalala, former US Secretary, Health & Human Services
"Addressing the Crisis of Violence." Health Affairs, Winter 1993.

Yet for its prevalence, domestic violence has only recently been recognized as a public health issue, with the Healthy People 2000 objectives specifically addressing the reduction of violence against women. After a decade of effort, considerable progress was made on many of the nineteen Health People objectives on Violence Prevention, with the notable exception of the goal of reducing the number of battered women turned away from shelters, in which there Healthy People 2010 lists Violence Prevention as one of its major focus areas, and deems violence as one of the ten leading indicators of the country's overall health (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2000).

An Ecological Perspective: Levels of Influence

- **Intrapersonal Factors** Individual characteristics that influence behavior, such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits
- **Interpersonal Factors** Interpersonal processes with peers, family, friends that provide social identity & role definition
- **Institutional Factors** Rules, regulations, policies and informal structures to constrain or promote behavior
- **Community Factors** Social networks and norms which exist as formal or informal groups and organizations
- **Public Policy** Local, state, and federal policies and laws for disease prevention, early detection, control and management

Health educators' expertise in the following areas are a perfect fit for domestic violence prevention efforts:

- **Community education**
- **Media advocacy**
- **Public policy advocacy**
- **Strong theory base in prevention methods**
- **Community collaboration**
- **Evaluation**