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Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight

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Fathers and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence affects families, but not all families are affected equally. This troubling pattern varies by age, race, socioeconomic status, and marital status. Domestic violence is damaging to relationships between men and their partners and to men and women's health. But the impact of domestic violence extends even further. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to suffer abuse, to have poorer relationships with parents, and to have poorer behavioral and academic outcomes.

Definitions

Domestic violence refers to the use of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, or economic abuse or coercion by an individual against a current or former partner.ⁱ Also known as *intimate partner violence*, it can occur between spouses, former spouses, or girlfriends and boyfriends, and it exists in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.ⁱⁱ Though men are more often the perpetrators, domestic violence may be committed by men or by women, and both men and women can be victims.ⁱⁱⁱ

Domestic violence may take one of several forms.

- *Physical violence* occurs when one partner uses physical force – such as hitting, punching, kicking, or burning – against the other.
- *Sexual violence* occurs when one partner forces the other to participate in some unwanted sexual behavior.^{iv}
- *Verbal violence* includes threats of harm toward the other partner.
- *Psychological or emotional violence* is defined as “trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts, or coercive tactics,” and may include degrading a partner, restricting what a partner is allowed to do, withholding information from a partner, or isolating a partner.^v

The severity of domestic violence can range greatly within and across households. Researchers have identified three types of domestic violence. Each of these can be perpetrated by partners of either gender and may be one-sided or mutual.

- *Situational couple violence*, also known as *common couple violence*, occurs when a disagreement or conflict escalates into violence, such as shoving or slapping.^{vi}
- *Patriarchal terrorism or intimate terrorism* is a “systematic, intentional” form of violence in which one partner – usually the man – terrorizes the
- other through physical violence, threats, and other tactics in order to control the victim.^{vii}
- *Violent resistance* is a victim's physical response to his or her partner's intimate terrorism.^{viii}

Importance and Implications of Domestic Violence

While further research is needed to untangle cause-and-effect factors, a considerable body of research suggests that domestic violence is associated with negative outcomes and behaviors for children and for partners. Less research has examined the implications of domestic violence for fathers. Still, the research that does exist suggests negative outcomes both for male victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Implications for Fathers

- Research suggests that fathers who are known to have committed domestic violence are less likely than are nonviolent fathers to receive full or joint custody of their children and are more likely to have restricted visitation rights.^{ix} Moreover, studies involving mothers who have been victims of domestic violence suggest that these women may prevent violent fathers from seeing their children.^x
- Although most victims of domestic violence are women, some men are victims of domestic violence as well. Some acts of domestic violence are committed by women in self-defense, and some acts are unprovoked.^{xi} Men who experience domestic violence are less likely to report it or to seek medical attention than are female victims.^{xii} Moreover, when men are in relationships in which women engage in more domestic violence than they do, the couple is often slower to move toward marriage than in relationships with no domestic violence.^{xiii}

Implications for Children

Children who witness domestic violence are at risk for developmental and behavioral problems.

- These children are more aggressive, inhibited, antisocial, fearful, and anxious than are children who do not witness domestic violence.^{xiv} Moreover, children in violent households tend to have lower self-esteem and are more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder.^{xv} Domestic violence is associated with depression and criminal behavior among children, as well as among adults who witnessed domestic violence as children.^{xvi} Finally, domestic violence may also affect children's cognitive development. Indeed, evidence suggests that children who live in households with high levels of domestic violence have poorer school performance, poorer verbal abilities, and lower IQ scores.^{xvii}

Implications for Fathers' Involvement With Children

Domestic violence has been shown to have negative effects on fathers' involvement and relationships with their children.

- Fathers who are violent towards their partners are involved in fewer activities with their children than are fathers who are not violent.^{xviii}
- Additionally, violent men report more arguments with their children, more restrictive monitoring of children, harsher parenting, and less positive family quality.^{xix} These men are more likely to spank and to yell at their children, are less likely to praise them, and are more likely to report their children to be unhappy, cruel, impulsive, stubborn, and sullen.^{xx}

Implications for Fathers' Partners

- Women suffering domestic abuse are at risk for both immediate and long-term problems. Women who have experienced recent domestic violence report poorer physical health than do other women.^{xxi} Recent domestic violence victims are also more likely to report having insomnia, major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder.^{xxii} Also, low-income women who report recent violence are more likely to have been homeless, to have faced eviction, or to have had insufficient food in the past year.^{xxiii}
- Over the long term, experiencing domestic violence is associated with reports of poorer health, chronic health problems, and chronic stress after the violence has ended.^{xxiv} As with recent domestic violence victims, women who have ever experienced domestic violence are more likely to have been diagnosed with depression, generalized anxiety disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder than are women who have never experienced domestic violence.^{xxv} These women also have lower self-esteem than those who have not experienced domestic violence.^{xxvi}
- Being a victim of domestic violence may affect a mother's parenting interactions with her children negatively. Mothers who suffer domestic violence have poorer psychological functioning^{xxvii} and increased levels of depression;^{xxviii} in turn, these characteristics are associated with poorer parenting behaviors.^{xxix} Moreover, mothers experiencing domestic violence have been found to be less warm towards their children,^{xxx} as well as to express more anger toward their children.^{xxxi}

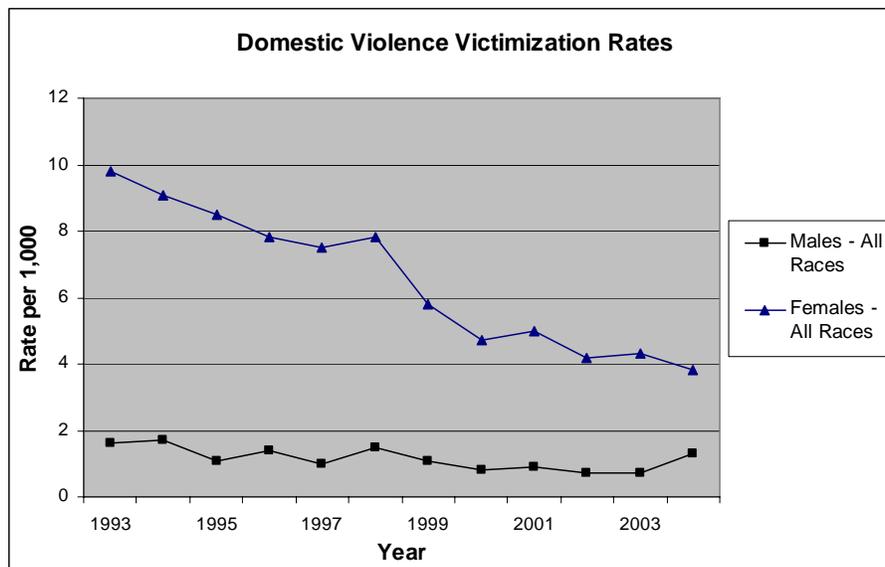
This evidence suggests that mothers' experiences with domestic violence spill over into their other relationships.

- Relationships involving domestic abuse are more likely to end than are relationships without domestic violence. Relationships in which men use domestic violence against their partners are more likely to end in separation.^{xxxii} In general, evidence suggests a greater likelihood of relationship instability in violent households.

Trends in Domestic Violence Victimization Over Time

Overall, as shown in **Figure 1**, domestic violence victimization rates for both men and women have been declining over time. However, victimization rates are still higher among women than among men.

Figure 1. Domestic Violence Victimization Rates (per 1,000) for Males and Females Aged 12 or Older, 1993-2004



Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Differences in Domestic Violence Victimization for Subgroups

Domestic violence is not limited to specific groups. Individuals of all ages, races, marital statuses, education levels, and places of residence experience and commit domestic violence. However, certain factors have been found to have special bearing on domestic violence victimization. These include gender, age, race, household income, and marital status.

Differences by Gender

Table 1 shows that women are more likely than are men to be victims of domestic violence; however, men are victims of domestic violence as well. Between 1993 and 2004, men were victims of domestic violence at a rate of 1.1 per 1,000, and women were victims of domestic violence at a rate of 6.4 per 1,000.

Table 1. Domestic Violence Victimization Rate (per 1,000) Among Females and Males Aged 12 and Older, 1993-2004

Year	Males - All Races	Females - All Races
1993	1.6	9.8
1994	1.7	9.1
1995	1.1	8.5
1996	1.4	7.8
1997	1.0	7.5
1998	1.5	7.8
1999	1.1	5.8
2000	0.8	4.7
2001	0.9	5.0
2002	0.7	4.2
2003	0.7	4.3
2004	1.3	3.8
Average	1.1	6.4

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Differences by Age

As shown in **Table 2**, males aged 20-24 are victims of domestic violence at higher rates than are males of other ages.^{xxxiii} Similarly, female victims of domestic violence tend to be young. Domestic violence rates are also highest among women aged 20-24.^{xxxiv}

Table 2. Average Domestic Violence Victimization Rates (per 1,000) Among Males and Females by Age, 1993-2004

Age	Victimization Rate Among Men	Victimization Rate Among Women
12-15	0.3	1.9
16-19	1.2	12.4
20-24	2.3	17.0
25-34	2.1	12.3
35-49	1.3	6.3
50-64	0.5	1.4
65+	0.1	0.2

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Differences by Race

Some evidence suggests that African American and American Indian/Native American men and women experience slightly higher rates of domestic violence victimization (see **Table 3**). Evidence also suggests that men and women of Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic backgrounds have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence.^{xxxv}

Table 3. Average Domestic Violence Victimization Rates (per 1,000) Among Males and Females by Race/Ethnicity, 1993-2004

Race/Ethnicity	Victimization Rate Among Men	Victimization Rate Among Women
White	1.1	6.3
Hispanic	0.9	6.0
African American	1.5	8.2
American Indian	5.0	18.2
Asian	0.1	1.5

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Differences by Socioeconomic Status

As shown in **Table 4**, lower-income couples are more likely to experience domestic violence than are higher-income couples.^{xxxvi} Men with household incomes under \$7,500 are the most likely to experience domestic violence, and their risk for victimization drops as income rises.^{xxxvii} Similarly, women with lower incomes report the highest rate of domestic violence. Among both men and women, those with household incomes over \$50,000 report the lowest rate of intimate partner violence.^{xxxviii}

Table 4. Average Domestic Violence Victimization Rates (per 1,000) Among Males and Females by Annual Household Income, 1993-2004

Annual Household Income	Victimization Rate Among Men	Victimization Rate Among Women
<\$7,500	2.2	18.4
\$7,500-\$24,999	1.6	9.5
\$25,000-\$49,999	1.1	5.9
\$50,000+	0.8	2.8

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Differences by Marital Status

Table 5 shows that separated, divorced, and single men are more likely to be victims of domestic violence than are married or widowed men.^{xxxix} Evidence suggests that married women are less likely to experience domestic violence than are women who are divorced, separated, or have never been married.^{xi} Overall, married couples report less domestic violence than do cohabiting couples.^{xli}

Table 5. Average Domestic Violence Victimization Rates (per 1,000) Among Males and Females by Marital Status, 1993-2004

Marital Status	Victimization Rate Among Men	Victimization Rate Among Women
Married	0.4	1.9
Divorced	3.5	15.0
Separated	12.4	60.1
Widowed	0.2	0.6
Never Married	1.4	8.7

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993-2004 (Catalano, 2006)

Definition of Measures

Domestic violence victimization rates among men and women over time were calculated based on results from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The data included here show the proportion of men and women experiencing physical violence (*a rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, aggravated assault, or simple assault*) at the hands of an intimate (*a spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend*) in either heterosexual or homosexual relationships. These rates do not include verbal or psychological/emotional violence. The Bureau of Justice Statistics notes that there were too few records of domestic violence victimization among Hispanic and African American men to conduct analyses of trends in victimization rates over time.

Data Limitations

Reliable data on individuals who *commit* domestic violence do not exist. Instead, studies have examined those – both men and women – who *suffer* domestic violence. Some studies, such as the Uniform Crime Reports, calculate the prevalence of crime reported to law enforcement agencies.^{xiii} However, domestic violence may often go unreported, and thus self-reported victimization, as is found in the NCVS, may better represent actual rates of domestic violence. In addition, data sources generally provide information on domestic violence rates among men but do not provide information broken down by fatherhood status. Finally, despite evidence showing that children in households marked by domestic violence are more likely than other children to suffer child abuse,^{xiii} surveys generally do not provide information on children in violent households (including age, gender, and biological status).

Data Sources

Tables and charts documenting domestic violence victimization rates among men were gathered from reports published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. These tables were created from analyses using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), an annual, nationally representative survey of criminal victimization in the United States. The survey includes 77,200 households and nearly 134,000 individuals.^{xiv}

Resources

- The **United States Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women** provides general information about domestic violence and federal, state, and local information resources about the issue: <http://www.usdoj.gov/ovw/domviolence.htm>
- The **Bureau of Justice Statistics** analyzes reports of violence, including domestic violence, across the United States: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>
- The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** offers information on domestic violence across the United States and options for victims of abuse: <http://www.ndvh.org/index.php>

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