

## Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the pattern of coercive behavior that involves physical abuse or the threat of physical abuse. It also may include repeated psychosocial abuse, assault, progressive social isolation, deprivation, intimidation, or economic coercion. Domestic violence is violence perpetrated by adults or adolescents against their intimate partners in current or former dating, married or cohabitating relationships of heterosexuals, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people.<sup>1</sup> It cuts across all race, class, ethnic, religious, and income levels.

## Domestic Violence Incidence and Prevalence

- It's estimated that 1.5 to 3.9 million women are physically abused by their partners every year.<sup>2</sup>
- One out of 3 American women report a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives has physically abused them.<sup>3</sup>
- A woman is physically battered every nine seconds in the United States.<sup>4</sup>
- Among gays and lesbians, domestic violence is the third-largest health problem facing gay men, second only to AIDS and substance abuse. Domestic violence occurs between 20-25% of lesbian relationships, about the same percentage as heterosexual relationships.<sup>5</sup>
- Annual estimates are 21,000 hospitalizations; 99,800 days of hospitalizations; 28,700 emergency department visits; and 39,000 physician visits for a total cost from injuries at \$44.4 million.<sup>6</sup>

## Domestic Violence and the Health Care System

- A current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend injured 37% of all women who seek care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries.<sup>7</sup>
- Women make 693,933 visits to the health care system every year for injuries from physical assaults.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Asian Health Services, "Domestic Violence Health Care Protocol: A Guideline for All Staff" 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund. "Preventing Domestic Violence: Clinical Guidelines on Routine Screening," 1999

<sup>3</sup> The Commonwealth Fund, First Comprehensive National Health Survey of American Women, New York, July 1993.

<sup>4</sup> The Commonwealth Fund. First Comprehensive National Health Survey of American Women, New York, July 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Caffrey, Next Door, Solutions to Domestic Violence, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Marti Loring and Roger Smith. "Health Care Barriers and Interventions for Battered Women," Public Health Reports, 109(3): 328-338, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, "Domestic Violence Victimization: A Primary Health Issue,"

<sup>8</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, "Preventing Domestic Violence: Clinical Guidelines on Routine Screening," 1999.

- It's estimated that between 7% and 17% of pregnant women are physically abused by their partner.<sup>9</sup>
- 31-54 percent of female patients seeking emergency services, 21-66 percent seeking general medical care, and up to 20 percent seeking prenatal care report partner abuse.<sup>10</sup>
- Despite the interaction with the health care system, less than 10 percent of primary care physicians routinely screen for domestic violence during regular office visits.<sup>11</sup>
- Emergency department staff only discussed domestic violence abuse with 40% of the abused women they treated.<sup>12</sup> In another study, only 5% of domestic violence victims in an emergency department were identified.<sup>13</sup>
- Among API women though, the interaction with the health care system may be less than other populations. At Asian Women's Center in New York, more than half of the women never receive medical attention for their injuries.<sup>14</sup>
- Cultural values can be utilized in programs. Elders in the community can assist in dealing with domestic violence, and shame caused by public exposure can help inhibit future abuse. A study reported that physical violence is reduced with APIs when police intervene.<sup>15</sup>
- Group counseling may be effective in providing a support system for women. Therapists should be direct and take an active role.<sup>16</sup>
- Women need a bilingual advocate to help them navigate the system so that they do not drift from shelter to shelter and suffer from psychological problems. At the Cameron House in San Francisco, a Cantonese-speaking advocate counsels women about their rights over the phone and helps them with restraining orders.
- Agencies need more accurate fund allocation formulas that take into account the higher cost of serving limited-English speaking API women.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, "Preventing Domestic Violence: Clinical Guidelines on Routine Screening," 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Family Violence Prevention Fund, "Preventing Domestic Violence: Clinical Guidelines on Routine Screening," 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Asian Health Services, "Domestic Violence Health Care Protocol: A Guideline for all Staff," 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Kandall, "Domestic Violence Intervention Calls for More than Treating Injuries," JAMA, 264(8): 939-944, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Eng, "Domestic Violence in Asian/Pacific Island Communities," Health Issues for Women of Color, pg. 78-88.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Ho, "An Analysis of Domestic Violence in Asian American Communities: A Multicultural Approach to Counseling," Women & Therapy, 9(1-2): 129-150, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Crites, "Cross-Cultural Counseling in Wife Beating Cases," Response, Issue 77,13(4): 8-12.

<sup>17</sup> The Plight of Battered Asian American Women, 174-176.

### *Barriers – [specifically for immigrants]*

- Women may be sponsored by their husbands or husbands' family; therefore, they may fear deportation (or deportation of their spouses) from reporting the abuse. The abuser may also threaten to withdraw her petition to legalize her immigration status.
- Women who are non- or limited-English speaking have limited culturally and linguistically appropriate services and are further socially isolated. Some shelters do not take women who don't speak English, and others may require women to pay per diem rates.<sup>18</sup> In Massachusetts, out of 35 women's shelters, only 2 have APIs on staff.<sup>19</sup>
- Undocumented women may also not be allowed to use certain shelters (if the shelter has funding restrictions).
- Undocumented women lack legal documentation. Abusers may threaten to report their undocumented status to the INS, take away their children, or withdraw her petition for legal permanent residency status.
- Women may lack economic means, and if they are undocumented, they may face strict immigration laws that prevent her from working or force her to work in exploiting environments.
- Women may lack knowledge of the legal system and their rights in the U.S.
- Women may be afraid to call the police because of negative experiences with a racist criminal justice system. Also, they may come from countries where police and other institutions do not respond to domestic disputes. The police often do not bring bilingual police officers or interpreters; therefore, they often talk to the person who speaks English. In most cases, the English-speaking person is the husband who can then minimize the seriousness of the situation.
- Women may lack the support of their extended family who remain in their country of origin.
- Women face racism and stereotypes from American society that may make them more vulnerable to abuse. Mail order bride companies perpetuate the stereotypes of Asian women being passive, obedient servants and/or exotic sex objects. These brides have few financial and social supports and are completely dependent on their husband.
- Women may have joined their husbands who are U.S. servicemen. Research indicates a higher incidence of domestic violence within military families.<sup>20</sup> Also, these women also have fewer financial and social resources and suffer from prejudices against interracial marriages.
- Immigrants/refugees escaping wars in their home countries have been exposed to environmental violence, causing heightened anxiety, depression and PTSD. It may also increase the acceptability of violence as a means of resolving conflicts.

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<sup>18</sup> The Plight of Battered Asian American Women, 174-176.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Huie, Boston Herald, August 8, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Deena Jang, "Asian Immigrant Battered Women and U.S. Immigration Policy," 1990.