



FATHERS and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE¹

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

Children exposed to domestic violence are at risk for psychological, social, and behavioral problems.

Domestic violence can also affect fathers' well-being, stability, and ability to parent.



- Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse in a relationship to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.ⁱ
- Domestic violence has wide- and long-reaching consequences that affect physical and mental health, economic security, and relationships between men and their partners.
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to suffer abuse, have poorer relationships with parents, and have poorer behavioral and academic outcomes.
- Children are also more likely to repeat patterns of abuse as adults.

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WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

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.ⁱⁱ Also known as *intimate partner violence (IPV)*, *domestic abuse*, or *dating violence*, it can occur in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships and between partners who are or were married, living together, dating, or coparenting. Although men are more often the perpetrators, men or women may commit domestic violence, and both men and women can experience harm.

Domestic violence may take several forms, all of which may occur within the same abusive relationship. Patterns of abuse also frequently escalate over time from less to more physical.

- **Physical violence** occurs when one partner hurts or attempts to hurt the other partner using physical force, by means of hitting, punching, kicking, or burning.
- **Sexual violence** occurs when one partner forces or attempts to force the other to participate in a sex act, sexual touching, or a non-physical sexual event (e.g., sexting) when the partner does not or cannot consent.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Verbal violence** includes threats of harm toward the other partner.
- **Economic or financial abuse** is behavior that seeks to control a partner's ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources, and hinders their self-sufficiency and financial autonomy.^{iv}
- **Psychological or emotional abuse** consists of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to control, isolate, frighten, or otherwise traumatize another partner. It can include degrading or dismissing a partner, restricting what a partner can do, or withholding information from a partner.^v
- **Stalking** is a pattern of unwanted attention and contact by a partner that causes a person to feel fear.^{vi}

The severity of domestic violence can range greatly within and across households. Abuse and harm may be perpetrated in person or via technology. Anyone can experience domestic violence, regardless of gender identity, age, race, sexual orientation, religion, education, geography, or economic status. Yet rates and experiences of harm across groups differ. For example, abusive partners often also tailor methods of exerting power and control to their unique situation, including their partners' immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, or disability status.



IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A considerable body of research shows that domestic violence is associated with negative outcomes and behaviors for partners and children. Despite a growing focus in the domestic violence literature on fatherhood, gaps remain regarding fathers as victims of domestic violence or in same-sex relationships.

Implications for Children. Children exposed to domestic violence are at risk for psychological, social, and behavioral problems.

- Children from violent households tend to have lower self-esteem and are more likely to experience depression, mood and anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as children or adults.^{vii} For example, they can be more aggressive, inhibited, antisocial, fearful, and anxious than children who do not witness domestic violence.
- Evidence suggests that children who live in households with high levels of domestic violence have poorer school performance; lower scores on verbal, motor, and cognitive skills assessments; and limited problem-solving skills.^{viii}
- Domestic violence is associated with substance use disorders, eating disorders, and other risky or criminal behavior among children, as well as among adults who witnessed domestic violence as children.^{ix}
- Many children exposed to IPV in the home are also victims of child abuse, maltreatment, or harm from a parent, and some are even victims of domestic homicide.^x
- They may also be more likely to perpetuate cycles of abuse as adults, whether by abusing a partner, experiencing domestic violence themselves, or maltreating their own children.^{xi}

Implications for Fathers' Involvement with Children. Domestic violence has been shown to have negative effects on fathers' interactions and relationships with their children. Considering that 75 to 80 percent of children exposed to father-perpetrated domestic violence continue to have contact with their fathers, this research is highly relevant and concerning.

- When domestic violence is present, both the abusive and abused parents risk poor attachment and low emotional attunement with their children.^{xiii} In general, fathers who are violent toward their partners are involved in fewer activities with their children than fathers who are not violent.^{xiv}
- Abusive fathers report more arguments with their children; more restrictive monitoring of children; and harsher, more over-reactive parenting. For example, these men are more likely to spank and yell at their children, less likely to praise them, and more likely to report their children to be unhappy, cruel, impulsive, stubborn, and sullen.^{xv} This hostility and over-reactivity is a strong predictor of negative outcomes for children.^{xvi}
- Abusive fathers may be legally prevented from interacting with their children. For example, they may be subject to civil protection orders that include orders for the payment of child support, temporary custody, or temporary visitation, and judges may grant restricted visitation rights or deny full or joint custody for abusive fathers.^{xvii}

Other Implications for Fathers. Domestic violence can affect fathers' well-being, stability, and ability to parent.

- Fathers with a history of causing harm to a partner have higher rates of depression than fathers who have not caused harm, and paternal depression has been shown to increase negative parenting practices and to increase children's difficulties.^{xviii}
- Domestic violence is likely to disrupt coparenting, which affects participation in parenting, communicating about parenting, and the ability to provide children with consistent rules. Studies have shown that conflict between parents affects a father's emotional availability and awareness of children's needs more than for mothers.^{xix}
- Relationships involving domestic abuse are more likely to be unstable or to end than are relationships without domestic violence.
- Although most victims are women, men may also experience domestic violence.
 - Men who experience domestic violence are less likely to report it or seek medical attention than women.^{xx}
 - Male victims of domestic violence are likely to experience similar mental health issues (e.g., PTSD, depression, or suicidality) as female victims.^{xxi}
 - When men are in relationships in which women are the predominantly abusive partner, the couple is often slower to move toward marriage than in relationships with no domestic violence.^{xxii}



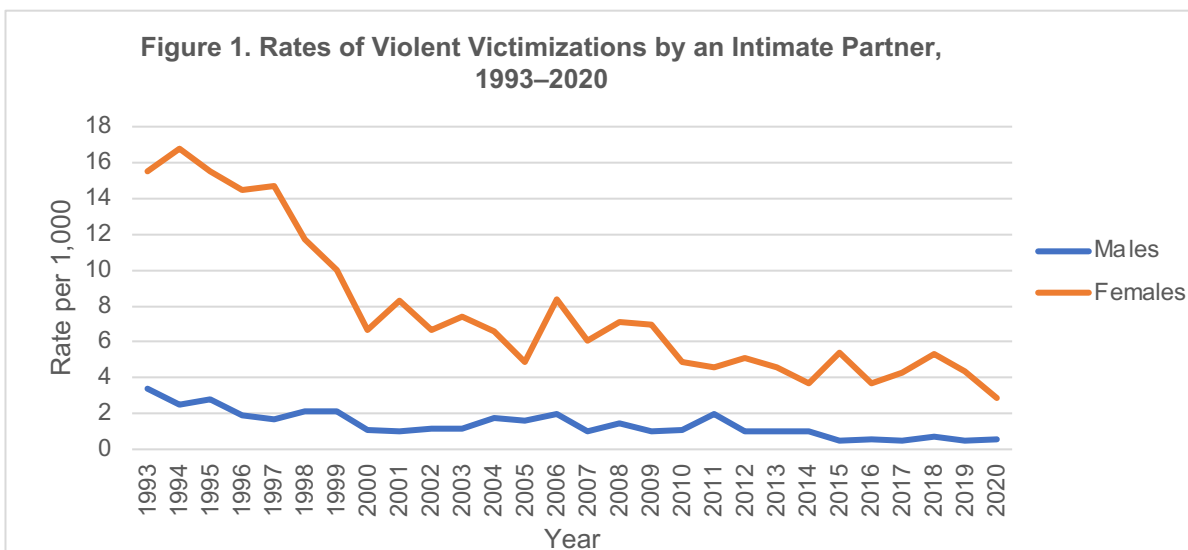
Implications for Fathers' Partners who Experience Harm. Parents who are harmed by a partner face short- and long-term consequences that can affect their health, economic stability, and parenting. Most research on this topic focuses on women and mothers in heterosexual relationships rather than on men in same-sex relationships.

- Victims of domestic violence may suffer physical injuries and experience other physical or mental health problems.
 - Roughly 35 percent of female survivors and 12 percent of male survivors experience some physical injury, and 21 percent and 6 percent, respectively, need medical care.^{xxiii} Victims may also experience challenges with sleeping, concentration, depression, unintended pregnancy, or sexually transmitted infections. Long-term health challenges can include chronic pain; issues with bones, heart, or digestion; migraines; and immune system problems.^{xxiv}
 - Domestic abuse victims report fear, depression, anxiety, and PTSD in both the short- and long-term.^{xxv}
 - Studies show that pregnant women are at risk of new or escalating domestic violence, which harms both the mothers and their children.^{xxvii}
 - People who experience domestic violence are more likely to engage in risky behaviors related to alcohol, drugs, and sex.^{xxviii}
- Domestic violence can have lasting consequences on the economic security of victims and their children by affecting their work, education, housing, and access to money.
 - Victims frequently miss work or school or lose a job, either because their partner forces them to or they need to recover from, report, or escape abuse.^{xxix}
 - Victims often report higher rates of housing instability than non-victims. For example, low-income women who report recent violence are more likely to have been homeless or to have faced eviction.^{xxx}
 - Victims of economic abuse may experience stolen or hidden money, damaged credit, coerced debt, or damaged property.^{xxxi}
 - These impacts and abuses can result in reduced financial security: victims often report insufficient access to food in the past year and an inability to meet their basic needs.^{xxxii}
- Experiencing domestic violence, and its short- and long-term consequences, can negatively affect parents' ability to effectively communicate, connect, and interact with their children, and increase the use of aggressive and authoritarian parenting styles.^{xxxiii}
 - Depression and lower psychological functioning have been shown to be related to poorer parenting in some studies.^{xxxiv}
 - Other mental health challenges and economic insecurity that stem from domestic violence may also make it difficult to provide a stable home and environment for one's children.
 - However, research has also shown that some mothers can compensate for the effects of the abuse by increasing how responsive they are to their children, the energy they invest into parenting, and their warmth and positivity as parents.^{xxxv}

TRENDS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMIZATION OVER TIME

Overall, as shown in **Figure 1**, victimization rates by an intimate partner for both men and women have declined over time. However, victimization rates are still higher among women than among men.



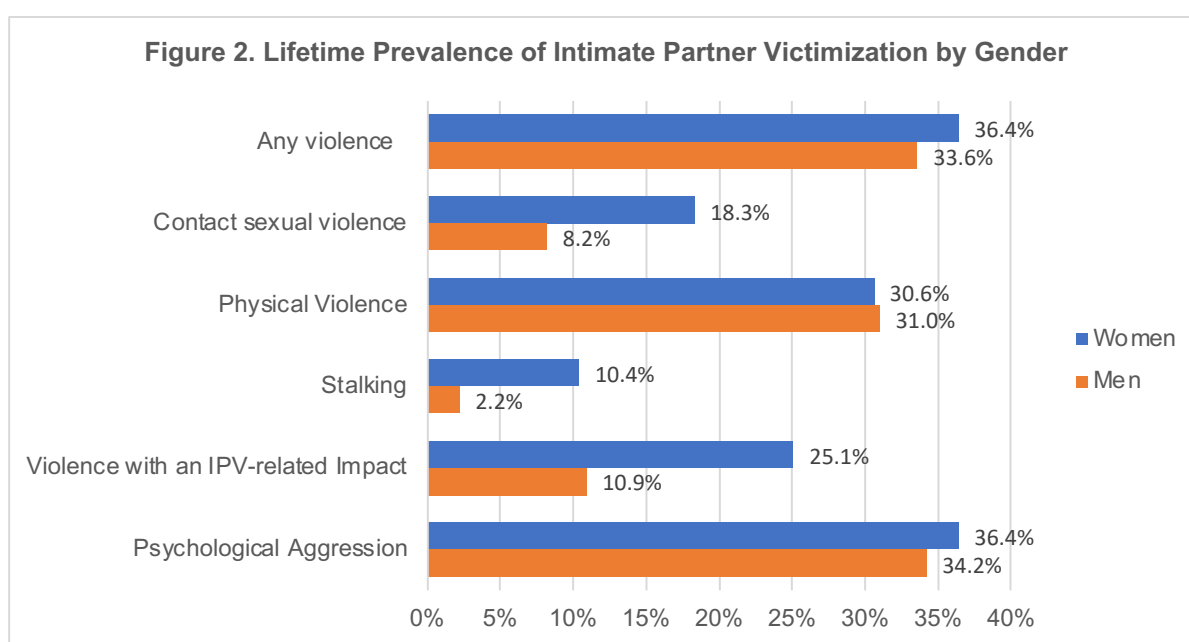
Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2020 [Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) 2021]



DIFFERENCES BY GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

As shown in **Figure 1**, the 2020 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicated that women are still more likely than men to experience domestic violence. However, the overall decline in reports of domestic violence has brought the incidence rates closer together, with men reporting victimization by an intimate partner at a rate of 0.6 per 1,000 in comparison to 2.9 per 1,000 for women.^{xxxvi}

The other major survey on domestic violence in the United States, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), provides additional context regarding the differences in domestic violence experiences by gender. In 2015, as shown in Figure 2, men and women reported similar lifetime prevalence rates for any type of violence (defined as contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner), just physical violence, and psychological aggression. However, only one in 10 men reported victimization with some form of impact related to the victimization, compared to one in four women, and men reported significantly lower rates of sexual violence and stalking than women.^{xxxvii}



Source: 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Smith et al. 2018)

There are also interesting differences in lifetime prevalence by sexual orientation, as shown in **Table 1**. According to the 2010 NISVS, sexual minority respondents reported intimate partner violence at rates similar to or higher than heterosexual respondents. Lesbian women are slightly more likely than heterosexual women to experience violence by a partner in their lifetime, whereas gay men are roughly equally likely to report victimization as heterosexual men. Although bisexual men and women report higher rates of violence than their homosexual or heterosexual peers, this difference is less significant for men than for women.^{xxxviii}

TABLE 1: LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF RAPE, PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, OR STALKING BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER BY SEXUAL ORIENTATION, 2010

	LESBIAN/GAY	BISEXUAL	HETEROSEXUAL
Women	43.8%	61.1%	35.0%
Men	26.0%	37.3%	29.0%

Source: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 (Breiding, Chen & Black 2014)

DIFFERENCES BY AGE

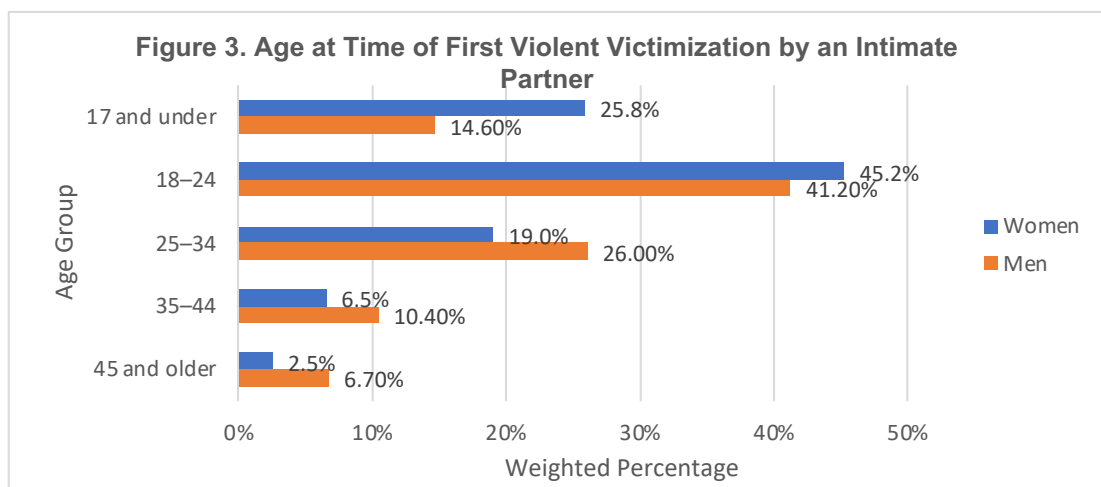
Table 2 shows that victimization by a partner is consistently higher for younger people. For most of the years captured by the NCVS, victimization was reported more often for those 18 to 24 years old, followed closely by those 25 to 34 years old. Rates for those between 18 and 34 years also demonstrated the greatest fluctuation between years. Domestic violence appears to be least common for older adults over the age of 50; this rate has held relatively stable at approximately 1.3 reports per 1,000 respondents over the last 28 years. However, despite spikes in certain years, rates for all other age groups have fallen over time, resulting in the differences in victimization rates by age narrowing significantly within the last 5 to 10 years.^{xxxix}

TABLE 2: RATE PER 1,000 OF VIOLENT VICTIMIZATIONS BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER BY AGE, 1993–2020

YEAR	15–17 YEARS OLD	18–20 YEARS OLD	21–24 YEARS OLD	25–34 YEARS OLD	35–49 YEARS OLD	50–64 YEARS OLD
1993	7.5	18.9	23.5	13.7	12.9	1.2
1996	10.7	25.4	20.7	16.9	6.0	1.8
1999	6.7	13.8	16.7	13.9	5.5	0.6
2002	4.0	10.5	10.5	6.7	4.7	0.8
2005	1.3	8.3	9.3	5.4	3.9	1.1
2008	1.3	3.7	12.6	9.4	5.5	1.4
2011	0.0	8.5	3.9	5.4	5.8	1.4
2014	2.9	1.1	4.3	6.1	2.4	1.6
2017	2.9	6.3	7.0	3.8	3.1	0.9
2020	1.6	3.0	2.4	3.5	2.2	1.3
Average	3.9	10.0	11.1	8.5	5.2	1.2

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2020 (BJS 2021)

The 2015 NISVS provides some additional insight by asking those respondents who reported violent victimization how old they were when they first experienced physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression by an intimate partner (Figure 3). Mirroring the trends seen in the NCVS, the majority of reported victims of both genders first experienced these forms of abuse before age 25: 71 percent of women and 56 percent of men were 24 years old or younger at the time of their first victimization. Yet, some differences also exist between women's and men's experiences. Women experienced more initial violence when they were younger than 17, whereas men reported more first victimizations than women in each of the age groups over 25.^{xi}



Source: 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Smith et al. 2018)

DIFFERENCES BY RACE

According to the NCVS as shown in **Table 3**, reported rates of intimate partner violence are slightly higher for people who identify as Black or “Other” than for people who identify as white or Hispanic. Yet, reports of domestic violence have dropped over time more for Black people than other racial or ethnic groups, followed by significant declines for white and Hispanic people. As a result, rates for all racial and ethnic groups have been similar on the NCVS for the last five years. The greatest fluctuation has been in rates among NCVS’s “Other” category, which includes all participants who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, as well as people who identify as two or more races.

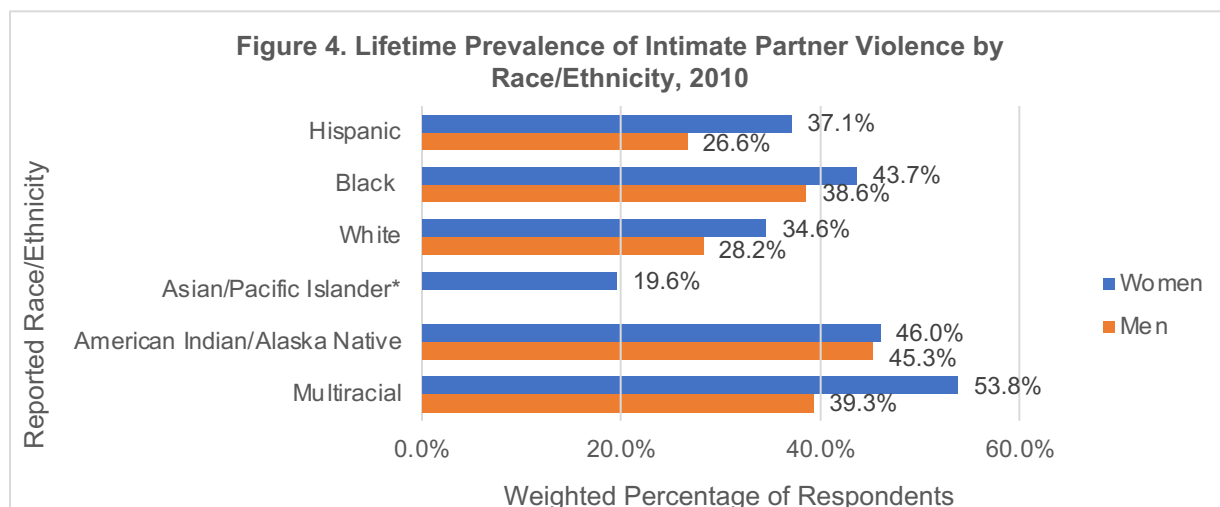
TABLE 3: RATE PER 1,000 OF VIOLENT VICTIMIZATIONS BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 1993–2020

YEAR	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER
1993	8.7	13.9	13.6	8.0
1996	8.3	10.1	8.2	4.1
1999	6.5	6.8	4.5	3.4
2002	4.0	6.6	1.7	2.4
2005	3.0	2.6	3.7	7.9
2008	5.0	3.0	3.0	2.6
2011	3.7	2.7	2.3	2.2
2014	2.3	1.5	3.2	2.4
2017	2.5	2.5	2.8	1.1
2020	1.7	2.3	1.6	1.5
Average	4.6	5.2	4.5	3.6

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2020 (BJS 2021)

“Other” category includes the racial categories of Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, and people of two or more races.

The NISVS data presented in **Figure 4** provide greater specificity on IPV by self-reported race/ethnicity and gender by allowing respondents to identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Multiracial. Men and women who identified as Black reported higher experiences of victimization by a partner than people identifying as Hispanic or white, but less than those identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native or Multiracial. Also, although we do not have sufficient data for Asian or Pacific Islander men, women of Asian or Pacific Islander backgrounds report experiencing lower rates of IPV than women in the other groups.^{xli}



Source: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 (Breiding, Chen & Black 2014)

* Estimate not reported for men (relative standard error > 30% or cell size ≤ 20)

DIFFERENCES BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

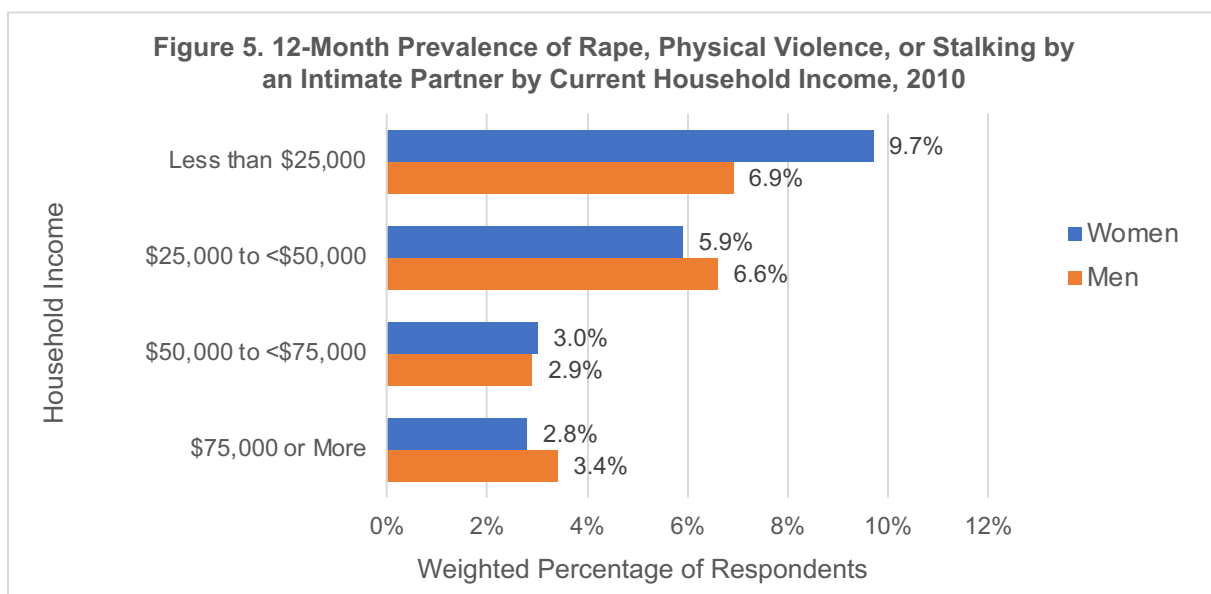
Data from both national surveys show clear differences in experiences of domestic violence by household income; those who earn less report higher rates of victimization than those who earn more. **Table 4** shows that people earning less than \$7,500 per year, and even those earning less than \$25,000 per year, are particularly vulnerable to violence, although the specific rates have fluctuated wildly over time. Conversely, those earning more than \$50,000 annually have consistently been at the lowest risk of violence from 1993 to 2020.

TABLE 4: RATE OF VIOLENT VICTIMIZATIONS BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 1993–2020

YEAR	LESS THAN \$7,500	\$7,500 TO \$14,999	\$15,000 TO \$24,999	\$25,000 TO \$34,999	\$35,000 TO \$49,999	\$50,000 TO \$74,999	\$75,000 OR MORE
1993	27.8	13.2	11.4	8.4	4.1	6.3	3.4
1996	23.9	15.7	11.1	6.8	5.6	3.0	1.2
1999	15.5	11.6	15.0	3.7	3.6	2.2	2.1
2002	10.8	3.4	8.2	7.3	3.9	0.8	1.3
2005	10.4	4.1	5.4	4.7	4.8	2.5	1.0
2008	14.6	7.0	10.5	6.2	3.0	2.3	1.0
2011	11.3	7.8	4.4	2.2	1.6	1.9	3.1
2014	2.0	5.5	6.0	2.9	3.0	0.6	1.2
2017	10.6	4.6	5.2	2.9	2.1	1.9	0.8
2020	2.2	5.5	3.5	2.7	2.0	1.1	1.0
Average	12.9	7.8	8.1	4.8	3.4	2.3	1.6

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2020 (BJS 2021)

These trends are reflected in the NISVS 12-month prevalence rates, which are also separated by gender, as shown in **Figure 5**. Although men report higher rates of violence at incomes below \$50,000 than incomes above \$50,000—roughly 7 percent compared to roughly 3 percent—a steeper drop occurs in prevalence for women between those earning less than \$25,000 and those earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000. It is noteworthy that prevalence rates are relatively equal for both men and women earning more than \$50,000.



Source: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 (Breiding, Chen & Black 2014)

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN VICTIMIZATION AMONG GROUPS

Despite the clear differences in victimization rates by an intimate partner described previously, it is important to acknowledge that having a particular identity (e.g., being a person of color, low income, or bisexual) does not in itself make one more likely to commit or experience harm as an intimate partner. Rather, numerous cultural and economic factors, many based on inequities, increase the risk of violence for certain groups. When domestic violence does occur in communities where people experience inequities, harm for survivors is often compounded.^{xlii}

➔ The stress of **ECONOMIC INSECURITY** can exacerbate the violent or controlling tendencies of abusive partners, and a lack of economic resources makes it more difficult for partners to leave, resulting in a greater chance of escalation and more severe abuse.^{xliii} People who experience economic disadvantages or discrimination based on their race/ethnicity, gender, or age may be more at risk than those who do not experience these inequities.

- Communities with high rates of unemployment, low-income jobs, and homelessness—which create additional vulnerability to abuse—report consistently higher rates of domestic violence.^{xliiv} This is more likely to affect people who identify as Black, Hispanic, Native American or Alaska Native, and Multiracial because they are more likely to live in such communities and experience economic discrimination.
- Women and LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience employment discrimination, which in turn can lead to economic disadvantages.
- Younger people may be at greater risk of economic security because they tend to earn less.

➔ **LACK OF AVAILABLE OR ACCESSIBLE SERVICES** such as domestic violence prevention, screening, and direct services can keep people from recognizing abuse or escaping violence before it escalates. In addition, culturally specific services for people of color or people with limited English proficiency are frequently not available;^{xliiv} services in rural or low-income areas or on reservations are scarce;^{xlivi} and prevention education for youth is also lacking.^{xliivii}

➔ **WITNESSING OR EXPERIENCING ABUSE AS CHILDREN** or witnessing violence in the community can lead to PTSD and coping mechanisms like alcohol and drug use that are risk factors for domestic violence.^{xliiii} When not addressed, these experiences can create cycles of abuse that escalate and/or perpetuate across generations if not interrupted.

- Breaking cycles of abuse is especially challenging in low-income areas with high rates of community violence or on reservations, which have limited support services.

➔ Certain groups, particularly **NATIVE AMERICANS AND BLACK PEOPLE**, also face challenges related to historical trauma stemming from the erasure of their lands and cultures, individual and communal experiences of violence, and the devaluation of women. This trauma is further compounded by ongoing structural racism and individual experiences of discrimination related to their identity.^{xlix}

- ➔ Some groups, including **PEOPLE OF COLOR AND LGBTQ+ PEOPLE**, have significantly lower rates of reporting to law enforcement due to factors such as a mistrust of the justice system, over-policing of their communities, and the desire to protect their community.ⁱ As a result, abusers may feel like they can act with impunity, and violence may continue uninterrupted.
- ➔ **ISOLATION**, which can be physical, social, or emotional, also exacerbates violence and harm. Physical isolation is often experienced on reservations, in rural areas, and within religious or other insular communities. Social and emotional isolation occurs when an abusive partner uses tactics related to a victims' identity (e.g., disability status, LGBTQ+, immigrant status) as leverage to enforce that isolation.ⁱⁱ
- ➔ Finally, **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND STIGMA OR STEREOTYPES** about domestic violence may limit victims' willingness or ability to acknowledge and recognize that they are experiencing domestic violence. Consequently, domestic violence may be under reported by various groups, including men, Asian people, and gay or lesbian people.ⁱⁱⁱ Stigma and stereotypes of bisexual people or Black women as oversexualized may also contribute to high rates of physical and sexual violence by a partner.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ





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: <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>
- 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>
- The **Victim Connect Resource Center** offers a help line by phone, text, or chat and an online Resource Map to search for national and local resources: <https://victimconnect.org/resources/search-resources/>
- The **Childhood Domestic Violence Association** is a nonprofit dedicated to helping those who experienced domestic violence in childhood: <https://cdv.org/>
- The **National Institute on Fatherhood and Domestic Violence** is a national project by Futures Without Violence that provides training and technical assistance to those who work with abusive fathers: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/engaging-men/national-institute-on-fatherhood-domestic/>

DATA SOURCES

The two main data sources for the figures and tables used to present trends in domestic violence are the [National Crime Victimization Survey](#) (NCVS) and the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) (NISVS). Both surveys rely on self-reported data from participants, but they ask about different types of violence and in different ways.

The NCVS is an annual, nationally representative survey of criminal victimization in the United States conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The NCVS collects data from people 12 years and older on both completed and attempted nonfatal personal crimes (described below) and household property crimes (i.e., burglary, trespassing, and theft). For each victimization, the survey asks about the offender, characteristics of the crime, whether it was reported, and experiences with the criminal justice system. The survey sample contains approximately 240,000 people in 150,000 households.

Conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the NISVS is an ongoing, nationally representative survey in the United States focused on sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence. It is conducted as a random-digit-dial telephone survey of women and men ages 18 and older who speak English or Spanish. Unlike the NCSV, which asks about physical forms of violence in the context of having experienced a crime, the NISVS takes a public health approach by asking about experiences of specific behaviors, including non-physical forms of sexual and domestic violence. In 2016/2017, the most recent survey year, roughly 27,500 adults (more than 15,000 women and 12,000 men) completed interviews.

DEFINITION OF MEASURES

The data included here from the NCVS show the proportion of men and women experiencing a crime of physical violence (rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, simple assault, and/or personal robbery) as perpetrated by an intimate partner (current or former spouses, boyfriends, and girlfriends). These rates do not include verbal, economic, or psychological violence or stalking by a partner. Beginning in 2003, BJS began allowing respondents to choose more than one racial category. The survey also began asking first if individuals are of Hispanic ethnicity before asking about race; therefore, data reported on white, Black, Asian, and other races exclude people who identify as Hispanic. BJS also caution that NCVS estimates for 2006 should not be compared to other years, largely due to changes in sample design and survey implementation.

The NISVS defines intimate partner violence as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, psychological aggression, or control of reproductive or sexual health by a current or former intimate partner.” In the survey, an intimate partner is described as a romantic or sexual partner and includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they dated, were seeing, or “hooked up.” Sexual violence is defined as a sexual activity when consent is not obtained or given freely and includes rape, being forced to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact. Stalking is defined as a pattern of repeated harassing or threatening behavior by someone else, causing fear or safety concerns.

DATA LIMITATIONS

As with all national datasets, both NCVS and NISVS have limitations. First, both are based on self-reports by individuals, which can result in bias based on who chooses to (or is able to) respond, the accuracy of their memory, and their willingness to report experiences of a highly sensitive and personal nature as intimate partner violence. Victims of domestic violence who still reside with an abusive partner or who are experiencing injuries related to violence may not be able to safely complete these surveys. Both primary surveys sample noninstitutionalized individuals — or only adults in the case of the NISVS — which means they may not accurately capture groups with the highest risk of violence and vulnerability, such as those who are incarcerated, homeless, or in an institutional care facility, or young children. Furthermore, both surveys are primarily conducted in English or Spanish (although the NCVS can be given in some other languages under some circumstances), which means a wide range of immigrants, refugees, and speakers of other languages are not able to take the surveys. The NCVS also does not ask about sexual orientation or gender identity. Finally, the fact that the NCVS is not behavior-based and asks primarily about physical crimes risks undercounting intimate partner violence specifically. Many people in abusive relationships may not consider the tactics used by their partner to be a crime or may not even acknowledge sexual violence by a partner as a crime of rape or assault. Men in particular may be hesitant to define themselves as a victim of domestic violence given the high levels of shame, stigma, and lack of dedicated services for this population.

Other data sources include the FBI Uniform Crime Report, but that is limited to what is reported to law enforcement agencies, and we know domestic violence is a severely underreported crime, particularly for communities who mistrust or fear violence from law enforcement, such as people of color, immigrants, or LGBTQ+ people. The existing national datasets are lacking information on relationship status at the time of victimization (married, separated, divorced, dating, cohabitating), parenthood status, and information about children in violent households (age, gender, biological status). Obtaining this information is vital given the evidence that children in households marked by domestic violence are more likely to suffer child abuse. Finally, reliable data from people who commit domestic violence do not exist, including their demographic information, the characteristics of their abusive behaviors, and their motivations and responses.

This information brief was developed by Malore Dusenbery (Urban Institute) on behalf of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

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Dusenbery, M. (2022). Fathers and domestic violence. [Data Spotlight].
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