

Domestic Violence Basics: Terms, Research, and Statistics for Improving Safety in Child Support

The SAVES Center has developed this resource to provide common domestic violence terminology, statistics, and relevant research, along with the supporting references for child support professionals when developing training, resources, making policy decisions and designing programs to ensure safe access to child support for survivors of domestic violence.

Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a complex and multifaceted social, public health, and criminal justice problem. Several different legal, societal, and research-based terms are often used to describe this type of violence. Statistics used to describe this type of violence vary based on what is measured and the data source. However, the SAVES Center recommends as a best practice to cite the **most recent** national statistics using the **primary data source**. These citations are provided at the end of this document.

Domestic Violence and Related Terminology

- **Domestic Violence (DV)** – The Federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) defines DV as a pattern of assaultive or coercive behaviors that may include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal and economic attacks that are used against an intimate partner to achieve compliance from or power and control over them.¹
 - Some common types of DV and the behaviors defined as DV are described in further detail below. The power and control wheel shown below further illustrate the various tactics that abusers use to maintain **power and control** over their intimate partners.²
- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** – Violence occurring between current or former intimate partners, including spouses, boyfriends/girlfriends, dating partners, and ongoing sexual partners, which is used to gain power and control over another person.³
- **Differences between DV and IPV** – Some definitions of DV take a broader approach referring to violence occurring between family members, household members, or current/former intimate partners.^{4,5} In contrast, IPV is a more specific definition referring only to violence committed between current or former intimate partners.
- **Differences between Victim and Survivor** – The terms victim and survivor are often used interchangeably to discuss the individual(s) who is or was being harmed. Using the word “survivor” is preferred by some DV experts and may help to promote feelings of empowerment, improve self-esteem, and aid in healing experiences.⁶

However, when speaking to the person who was or is being harmed the terminology used should always match how they describe themselves.

- **Perpetrator/Abuser/Batterer:** These terms can be used interchangeably to describe the person responsible for causing harm to the victim. Survivors and advocates often refer to these individuals as the “person who causes harm.”
- **Common Types of DV**
 - **Physical violence** – Involves physically hurting or attempting to hurt another individual, using physical force. Examples include behaviors such as hitting, kicking, pulling hair, choking, suffocating, burning, or slamming an individual against an object.³
 - **Sexual violence** – Rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.³
 - **Stalking** – A pattern of harassing or threatening tactics used by a perpetrator that is both unwanted and causes fear or safety concerns in the survivor.³
 - **Psychological aggression** – Expressive aggression (such as name calling, insulting or humiliating an intimate partner) and coercive control, which includes behaviors that are intended to monitor and control or threaten an intimate partner.³
 - **Economic abuse** – Abuse that occurs when one partner interferes with their partner’s ability to “acquire, use, and maintain economic resources.”⁷ For example, one partner may control the financial resources in the household or prevent another partner from seeking or maintaining employment.⁷
 - **Reproductive control** – The attempt to dictate reproductive decisions for a partner.⁸ “Stealthing,” or removing a condom during sex without a partner’s knowledge, is an example of this type of victimization.⁸
 - **Harm to pets and destruction of property** – Harm to an individual’s pet or the destruction of personal property, often done to inflict psychological harm.⁹
 - **Other controlling behaviors** – May include the abusive partner isolating the victim from their family and friends to maintain domination and control.⁹



Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. (n.d.). Power and Control Wheel. Duluth, MN: Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

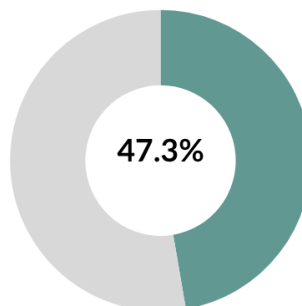
Domestic Violence Research and Statistics

Various sources describe the prevalence of DV in the general population and safety within the child support system. The below sections detail this violence using commonly cited research and statistics.

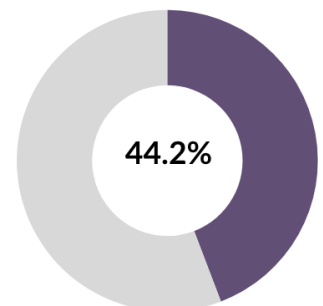
Prevalence of Domestic Violence

- Nearly 1 in 2 women (47.3%) and more than 2 in 5 men (44.2%) reported experiencing DV (contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking) at some point in their lifetime.¹⁰

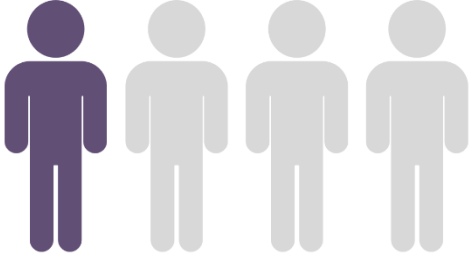
Women Experienced DV



Men Experienced DV



1 in 4 were victimized before age 18



- Among female victims, 72.3% reported that their first victimization by an intimate partner occurred before age 25.¹⁰
 - Of those victims more than 1 in 4 were victimized before age 18.¹⁰

- Among male victims, 62.1% reported that their first victimization by an intimate partner occurred before age 25.¹⁰
 - Of those victims, 1 in 5 were first victimized before age 18.¹⁰
- In the U.S., 2 in 5 women (41.0% or 51.2 million) experienced DV (contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking) during their lifetime and reported at least one DV-related impact as a result. DV-related impacts include being fearful, concerned for safety, experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, being injured, needing medical care, needing help from law enforcement, missing at least one day of work, or missing at least one day of school.¹⁰
- Among U.S. men, 1 in 4 (26.3% or 31.1 million) experienced DV (contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking) during their lifetime and reported at least one DV-related impact (listed in the previous bullet) as a result.¹⁰

Safety in the Child Support System

- A pilot study conducted in 12 districts in New York state found that approximately 40% of parents applying for child support disclosed a safety concern with the other parent on the case.¹¹
- A study in Texas of in-hospital Acknowledgement of Paternity (AOP) signers found that 37% of parents in the child support system had a domestic violence concern on their case.¹²
- Up to 93% of survivors who disclose having experienced DV report wanting the other parent to pay child support.¹³
- The birth of a child, the establishment of a child support order, and child support enforcement activities can all be triggers for violence.¹⁴



Of survivors who disclose having experienced DV report wanting the other parent to pay child support

Impact of Domestic Violence

DV is associated with several adverse economic consequences.

- Based on 43 million U.S. adults with IPV victimization histories, the per-victim cost was \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men resulting in a total of \$3.6 trillion over the lifetime of these victims.¹⁵

\$3.6 Trillion in Economic Losses:



\$2.1 Trillion in Medical Costs



\$1.3 Trillion in Productivity Loss



\$73 Billion in Criminal Justice Costs



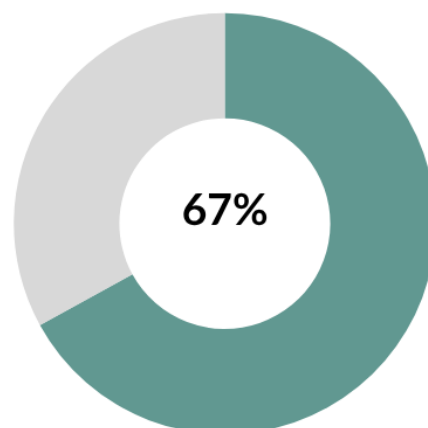
\$62 Billion in Victim Property Damage and Losses

○ Of this total \$3.6 trillion, approximately \$2.1 trillion (59%) was estimated in medical costs, \$1.3 trillion (37%) was lost due to reduced productivity for victims and those who cause harm, \$73 billion (2%) went to the criminal justice system, and \$62 billion (2%) was used for costs such as victim property damage or other losses.¹⁵

- Survivors on average report losing 4.9 work productivity days due to DV.¹⁶
- One of the primary reasons that DV survivors stay with or return to an abusive partner is financial dependence. Two-thirds (67%) of survivors surveyed said that they stayed longer than they wanted or returned to an abusive relationship because of financial concerns, such as not being able to pay bills, afford rent/mortgage, or feed their family.¹⁷

90% of survivors surveyed indicated that public benefits are either 'very much' (78%) or 'somewhat' (13%) important for being able to provide basic necessities for their family.¹⁷

Percent of Survivors Who Stayed Longer Because of Financial Concerns



¹ OCSS Training (n.d.) Safer Access to Child Support For Victims Of Domestic Violence.

² Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. (n.d.). Power and Control Wheel. Duluth, MN: Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

³ Smith, S. G., Zhang, X., Basile, K. C., Merrick, M. T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M. J., & Chen, J. (2018). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief-Updated Release. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/60893>

⁴ Mears, D. P., & Visher, C. A. (2005). *Trends in Understanding and Addressing Domestic Violence*. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 20(2), 204-211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504267739>

⁵ The words domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) are often used interchangeably. However, the SAVES project and OCSS use the term domestic violence as a broader term to describe this type of violence.

⁶ Delker, B. C., Salton, R., & McLean, K. C. (2020). *Giving Voice to Silence: Empowerment and Disempowerment in the Developmental Shift from Trauma 'Victim' to 'Survivor-Advocate'*. Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 21(2), 242-263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2019.1678212>

⁷ Postmus, J. L., Hoge, G. L., Breckenridge, J., Sharp-Jeffs, N., & Chung, D. (2020). *Economic Abuse as an Invisible Form of Domestic Violence: A Multicountry Review*. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 21(2), 261-283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018764160>

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- ⁸ Rowlands, S., & Walker, S. (2019). *Reproductive control by others means, perpetrators and effects*. *BMJ Sexual & Reproductive Health*, 45(1), 61-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.srh-2018-200156>
- ⁹ Campbell, A. M., Thompson, S. L., Harris, T. L., & Wiehe, S. E. (2021). *Intimate Partner Violence and Pet Abuse: Responding Law Enforcement Officers' Observations and Victim Reports From the Scene*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(5-6), 2353-2372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518759653>
- ¹⁰ Leemis, R. W., Friar, N., Khatiwada, S., Chen, M. S., Kresnow, M. J., Smith, S. G., ... & Basile, K. C. (2022). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey : 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence*. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/124646>
- ¹¹ Davis, L., & Starcher, D. L. (2025). *Building a Safer Child Support Program for Survivors: Findings from the New York Family Safety Questions Pilot Study*. *Center for Policy Research*.
- ¹² Osborne, Cynthia et al. (2013). *In-Hospital Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP): A Portrait of Father Involvement and Support in the First Three Years after a Nonmarital Birth*. *Child and Family Research Partnership*.
- ¹³ Pearson, J., Griswold, E. A., & Thoennes, N. (2001). *Balancing Safety and Self-Sufficiency: Lessons on Serving Victims of Domestic Violence for Child Support and Public Assistance Agencies*. *Violence Against Women*, 7(2), 176–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010122182389>
- ¹⁴ Pearson, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2015). *Child Support Program and Parenting Time Orders: Research, Practice, and Partnership Project – Site Visit Report*. *Center for Policy Research*. <https://centerforpolicyresearch.org/publications/child-support-program-and-parenting-time-orders-research-practice-and-partnership-project-site-visit-report/>.
- ¹⁵ Peterson, C., Kearns, M. C., McIntosh, W. L., Estefan, L. F., Nicolaidis, C., McCollister, K. E., ... & Florence, C. (2018). *Lifetime Economic Burden of Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Adults*. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 55(4), 433-444. [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(18\)31904-4/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(18)31904-4/abstract)
- ¹⁶ Peterson, C., Liu, Y., Kresnow, M. J., Florence, C., Merrick, M. T., DeGue, S., & Lokey, C. N. (2018). *Short-term Lost Productivity per Victim: Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, or Stalking*. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 55(1), 106-110. [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(18\)31634-9/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(18)31634-9/abstract)
- ¹⁷ National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, & the National Latina Network. (2018). *"We Would Have Had to Stay": Survivors' Economic Security and Access to Public Benefits Programs*. https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-11/NRCDDV_PublicBenefits-WeWouldHaveHadToStay-Nov2018.pdf