

Developing a Better Understanding



Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, includes any physical, sexual, or psychological harm committed by a current or former partner, spouse, or family member.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network found that from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, 77 fatal domestic violence cases were reported in the state of Ohio, resulting in 109 fatalities. Of these cases:

- 18% involved children at the scene. Four victims under the age of 18 were killed.*
- 38% involved suicide.*
- One law enforcement officer was killed in the line of duty.*
- 88 people were killed or injured by guns.*
- At least 20 of the perpetrators had been previously charged with or convicted of domestic violence prior to the fatal event.*

Domestic Violence in the Era of COVID-19

One out of every four women and one out of every ten men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. According to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), domestic abuse, or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), encompasses any “physical, sexual, or psychological harm committed by a current or former partner or spouse.” People who experience IPV oftentimes simultaneously face structural barriers, such as inadequate or unreliable childcare and financial instability, when attempting to flee the abusive situation.

While people of all races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, classes, and religions experience domestic violence, communities of color and marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted. The New England Journal of Medicine indicated that the combination of economic instability, poor housing, neighborhood crime, and lack of safe and stable childcare and social support can worsen already tenuous situations. Domestic partner violence cannot be addressed without also addressing social factors, especially in the context of a pandemic that has necessitated substantial isolation.

Domestic Violence During COVID-19

Home is often understood to be a “safe” place. However, for those living with an abuser, home is associated with fear, violence, and manipulation. The 2020 COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, while necessary to stop the spread of the virus, placed many individuals in isolation with their abusers. This isolation may limit the opportunities victims have to receive the assistance and treatment they need. With many schools closed and limited access to healthcare facilities, mandatory reporting has decreased in Ohio and across the country.

Due to decreased economic opportunities, lock down with abusers, and overall familial stress, deaths due to domestic violence have increased since the pandemic began. ODVN found that the past year has seen a 33% increase in fatalities related to domestic abuse. Children are present at 18% of domestic abuse fatalities, leading to intense childhood trauma and heightened risk for behavioral health issues.

The pandemic has also caused an increase in substance abuse and symptoms of mental illness. All types of abuse have significant effects on victims’ mental health, but abusers could be suffering from their own mental illness, symptoms of which may be exacerbated by isolation, disruption of routine, new financial stressors, and an unwillingness to access treatment. Addiction and domestic violence are strongly linked; the presence of drugs and alcohol makes for a far more dangerous environment for victims.

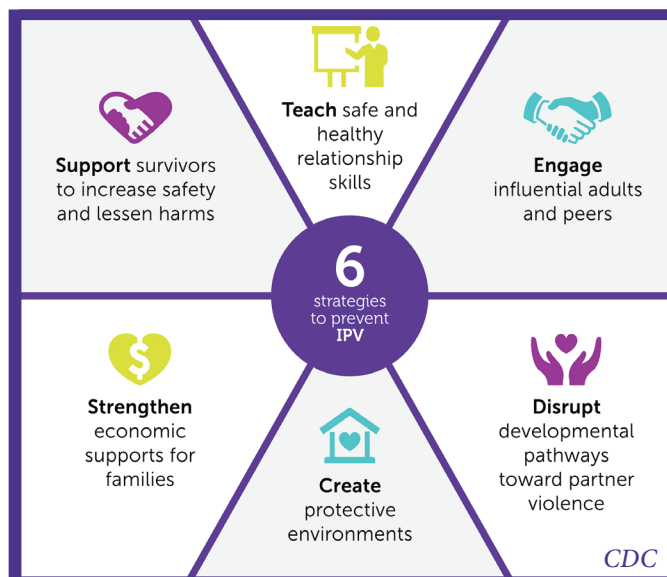
Identifying Domestic Violence

Not all victims of domestic violence are able to identify what they experience at home as abuse. This prevents victims from asking for help and can make it difficult for professionals in the community to link victims to needed supports. It is important for victims to understand the multifaceted effects of relationship control, and for screening tools to be implemented at healthcare and behavioral healthcare facilities and other entities that provide social supports to connect victims to services and prevent further abuse.

Power and control are central to domestic violence. Abusers use physical and sexual violence, emotional manipulation, financial control, or a combination of the three to wield power over their victims. The loss of control and self agency that victims experience is not only incredibly damaging to a strong sense of self and their mental wellbeing, but can also result in life altering physical traumas. Traumatic brain injuries, for example, are often overlooked as a side effect of domestic violence, but can cause heightened mental health and substance abuse issues and be related to loss of memory and cognitive function (Ohio State University).

Partnerships for Violence Prevention and Intervention

Preventing domestic violence requires collaboration across sectors, to change the contexts and underlying risks that contribute to IPV in homes, schools, and communities. Partnerships among public health, community behavioral health, government, education, social services, business, criminal justice, housing, advocacy, and media organizations can help foster healthy relationships and financial stability, which are proven violence prevention strategies. Where prevention is not effective, these same partnerships can provide the necessary connections and support that help victims and families leave abusive situations. Because the field of violence prevention evolves as best practices are discovered, community organizations and healthcare providers should be trained regularly on prevention and intervention strategies and screening tools.



Mental health and substance abuse treatment is a critical issue for survivors of domestic violence, because of the highly traumatic nature of living in a violent home or relationship. When drugs or alcohol are easily accessible in the home, abusive situations can quickly escalate and become more violent. Increased substance use is also a common coping method for survivors, many of whom experience a combination of post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression as a result of their abuse. While mental illness does not always play a role in IPV, untreated symptoms can affect the behaviors, thought processes, and willingness to access treatment for both perpetrators and survivors.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network maintains a database of programs that offer a safe place for legal services, counseling, and housing assistance to help survivors transition to independent lives free of abuse, manipulation, and fear. More information on ODVN's resources and programs are available at odvn.org or 1-800-934-9840. In Ohio, local Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Boards are the most reliable source for information on local programs, support groups, and behavioral health resources. To learn more about local crisis lines or to contact your ADAMH Board, visit oacbha.org.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides free, confidential support and safety planning at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Sources

Centers for Disease Control
Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma
National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

New England Journal of Medicine
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Ohio State University