Institute for Women’s Policy Research

Measuring the Cost of Intimate Partner Violence Study History

As a national training and technical assistance provider for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) receives frequent requests from OVW grantees for research on the economic consequences and cost that domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking has on survivors. Unfortunately, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the full financial costs and economic impacts of violence and abuse. The data that does exist is often either limited in scope, specific to a few specific costs or extremely dated.

Most of the national research on violence rates and impacts was done in the mid-1990s and early-2000s after the original Violence Against Women Act was passed. The foundational National Violence Against Women Survey by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was conducted in 1995 and found that intimate partner violence (IPV) costs society over $5.8 billion annually due to health care and lost productivity. While large-scale, national studies such as this are the most comprehensive sources of data on this topic, they are limited by their age, their frequent focus on the cost to society rather than the individual victim, and their omission of non-intimate partner sexual assault and stalking. Furthermore, research on violence has seldom examined varying economic impacts by race or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability or geographic location.

In 2015, IWPR received funding from OVW to address this research gap and provide grantees with the data needed to identify appropriate and cost-effective interventions in response to the economic impacts violence and abuse has on survivors. Upon receiving funding, IWPR conducted an extensive literature review to assess the availability of data, determine where gaps remain, and identify model survey instruments. IWPR also convened a group of domestic violence practitioners, researchers, and survey methodology experts to help inform the development of a survey.

The study would seek to address the following research questions:

1. What are the direct monetary and indirect opportunity costs survivors face as a result of abuse?
2. What are the dollar values of these losses?
3. What role do economic factors play in survivors’ decisions about whether to stay with or return to abusive partners? Which economic factors pose the greatest obstacles to leaving an abusive relationship?
4. What economic resources do survivors feel have best helped them address the economic effects of abuse and rebuild their lives? Which resources do they wish they had received, or received more of? What do they think it would take for them to fully recover from the economic harm they have faced?

The research questions will be explored through a national study that 1) analyzes available survey data to estimate the costs of abuse to survivors; and, 2) conducts an online survey that collects additional data to supplement the available literature.