

Research-in-Brief

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Measuring the Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the women's movement fought to redefine domestic violence, historically considered a private family problem, as a public issue. The success of this movement in bringing spouse abuse to the attention of the public resulted in the passage of laws such as the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act of 1984 and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. These laws have assisted victims in making greater claims on services, brought more attention to issues of domestic violence, and led to efforts to collect data on the extent of the domestic violence problem and to estimate its costs.

Measuring the Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women and the Cost-Effectiveness of Interventions, based on a collaborative research effort by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR); Victim Services, Inc.; and the Domestic Violence Training Project, reports on the methods and data available to build an economic model for measuring the direct and indirect societal costs of domestic violence and to assess the cost-effectiveness of interventions. The project focused on the following areas of service use: health care, child welfare, homelessness, criminal justice, and social services (i.e. employment training). Additionally, IWPR reviewed available research concerning costs that are not directly measurable, such as the cost to employers of absenteeism and decreased productivity that result from domestic violence.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence

A variety of national studies attempts to document the prevalence of domestic violence. Although definitions of spouse abuse and domestic violence against women are contested and difficult to measure, research by Stark and Flitcraft and by Stout shows that as much as 20 percent of the adult female population suffers from this abuse, while a survey by the Commonwealth Fund shows that over eight percent of women living with or married to a man reported abuse in the previous year. Between 1992 and 1993, of all acts of violence against women by a lone offender, 29 percent were committed by an intimate (defined as a husband, ex-husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend; See Table 1).

Defining Domestic Violence

The definition of domestic violence is a crucial element in determining what to include in a measure of the associated costs. Yet no consensus exists as to the actual definition of domestic violence against women. Domestic violence is increasingly defined as a course of coercive conduct existing in any intimate relationship, past or present, that includes not only physical force, but also a pattern of mental abuse and control including intense criticism, "put downs" and verbal harassment, sexual coercion and assaults, isolation due to restraint of normal activities and freedom, and denial of access to resources. Although the joint-study authors would recommend this broad definition in the calculation of direct and

Service	Usage	Cost
HEALTH CARE: Emergency room care	19% of women with injuries who present themselves at ER are victims of abuse (Stark & Flitcraft, 1991).	A study at Rush Medical Center in Chicago estimated an average charge for medical services to abused women, children, and older people as \$1,633 per person per year, excluding psychological or follow-up costs (Meyer, 1992).
CHILD WELFARE: Foster care	Of the 256,000 children in foster care (1995 est.), an estimated 50 percent are victims of abuse (Committee on Ways & Means, 1994).	\$2.5 billion Federal foster care expenditures under Title IV-E in 1993 (Committee on Ways & Means, 1994).
HOMELESSNESS: Emergency shelters	11% - 64% of homeless women are victims of abuse (D'Ercole & Struening, 1990).	The Women Against Abuse Center in Philadelphia reported an annual budget of \$2.5 million, or \$68 per person per day (Working Woman, 1994).
HOMELESSNESS: Supported housing (transitional, Section 8, public housing)	17% - 70% of housed mothers are victims of abuse (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1988).	\$6,588 million was allocated for FY1995 in total subsidies for public housing. The monthly appropriation rate per occupied unit is \$481 (U.S. HUD, 1995).
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: Arrests by police	5% - 16% of domestic violence calls result in arrest in the District of Columbia (Baker, Cahn & Sands, 1989).	The New York City Police Department made 12,724 domestic violence arrests in 1989, at an average cost of \$3,241 per arrest. (Zorza, 1994).
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: Prison and detention costs of batterers	20,170 male prisoners were incarcerated for harming an intimate in 1991 (U.S. DOJ, 1994b).	Average annual operating expenditures per inmate (nationwide) in 1990 were \$15,513 (U.S. DOJ, 1992).
SOCIAL SERVICES: Job training	16% - 84% of women in training are victims of abuse (Raphael, 1995)	\$1,500 per person for JTPA training.

analyst can evaluate any change in the cost (either from a decline in prevalence or a decline in costs) from one year to the next after the implementation of the new intervention.

Table 2 includes a variety of numbers that can be substituted for institutional prevalence and the cost of services. These data should be considered only as illustrative of how the cost model might be applied; further review of the validity of these figures and the comparability of these studies' findings must be done before calculating reliable total cost figures.

Indirect Costs

In determining the indirect economic costs of domestic violence, researchers need to impute two kinds of values: 1) the cost of lost productivity and 2) the cost of mortality. Although much of the data on productivity losses are based on small scale studies and the overall prevalence of domestic violence among working women is not available, some beginning calculations for these losses due to domestic violence can be made. For instance, the finding that 30 percent of abused working

Service	Usage	Cost
Job Loss of Victim	24%-30% of abused working women lose their jobs (Shepard & Pence, 1988; Stanley, 1988).	U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a, provides data on women's earning scales, by age.
Disruption at Work Place	75% of victims are harassed at work by their abuser (Friedman & Couper, 1987).	U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a, provides data on women's earning scales, by age.
Poor Work Habits	64% of battered women arrived an hour late 5 times per month (Stanley, 1992).	U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a, provides data on women's earning scales, by age.
Lost Productivity Due to Premature Mortality	35% of female homicide victims are murdered by an intimate or other relative (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995).	U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a, provides data on women's earning scales, by age.

women lose their jobs or that 50 percent of abused working women report being unable to attend school can be coupled with information on women's average earnings by age to yield estimates of productivity losses (see Table 3).

Indirect Social and Psychological Costs

Analysts argue that the indirect costs of domestic violence to women, to communities, and to society also include losses in the quality of life. These indirect social and psychological costs to women fall into three categories: loss of control over one's environment; alienation from one's self, friends, family, and community; and loss of one's ability to pursue future aspirations. Analysts would also have us consider losses to communities and society, including women's increased dependency, their lack of power, and restraints on their activities. Although quantifying these losses is difficult, it is necessary in order to get a full picture of the costs of domestic violence.

The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare and Job Training

For many battered women, welfare is the only alternative income source, and the only immediate way for them to free themselves from financial dependence on their abusers. Given the prominent role of economic independence as a factor in battered women's ability to leave abusive relationships, further research is needed to examine the role of welfare in the well-being of battered women and the training supports needed to help them lead safe, independent lives.

Studies by NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund and by Raphael show that anywhere from 20 to 80 percent of women in welfare-to-work programs around the country were victims of domestic abuse. This has important implications for the effectiveness of training and education programs. Many women, once enrolled in these programs, may be prevented from participating by their partners. Additional support services may be needed at the training site, without which

enrollees may not be able to complete training programs within expected time limits.

Federal changes to welfare policy in the Personal Responsibility and Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 allow (but do not require) a state to include "battering and extreme cruelty" among those conditions which exempt recipients from time limits imposed on the receipt of cash assistance. Waivers may be granted in cases where any requirement would make it harder for welfare recipients to escape domestic violence or unfairly penalize past, present, or potential domestic violence victims. The Family Violence Amendment to the welfare bill contains no limitation on how many waivers a state may grant in cases of domestic violence.

The Need for Further Research

To our knowledge, there are no national studies that determine the direct costs of domestic violence against women; no national studies to determine the extent of the lost production in firms, households, and communities from this source of violence against women; and insufficient data to assess

whether services are cost-effective in reducing the prevalence of abuse. The claim that domestic violence against women is a legitimate social problem requiring substantial investment by the public and private sectors needs to be supported by credible information on both the number of individuals affected and the economic cost to victims, institutions, taxpayers, and society. Without such information, policymakers, taxpayers, foundations, private firms, and the medical, criminal justice, and social service establishments will likely be unwilling to allocate increasingly scarce resources to address this problem.

By demonstrating the effect of domestic violence on individuals and society, reliable estimates of the direct and indirect costs of abuse will help to strengthen the argument for intervention by a wide range of social institutions (government, health care, business). Based on its preliminary review of the literature, the joint study suggests that estimates of some of the costs can be made. Estimates of all these costs are worth pursuing as a means of educating funders, policymakers, businesses, and the general public. To make progress in estimating the indirect social costs of domestic violence, research needs to be stimulated more widely in the field.

This fact sheet is based on "Measuring the Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women and the Cost-effectiveness of Interventions," by Louise Laurence and Roberta Spalter-Roth as part of a joint project of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Victim Services, Inc., and the Domestic Violence Training Project. The report is available from IWPR for \$10 prepaid. For full citations, please see the full report. Contact IWPR, Publications Division, 1400 20th Street, NW, Suite 104, Washington, DC 20036. Phone: (202) 785-5100 Fax: (202) 833-4362

This Research-In-Brief was prepared by Stacey Friedman with Jackie Chu and Heidi Hartmann in December 1996. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to conducting and disseminating research that informs public policy debates affecting women. Members of the Institute receive regular mailings including fact sheets such as this. Please see the reverse or contact the Institute for further information about individual and organizational memberships.