



# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND GENDER

In recent years, some groups have suggested that men and women are at equal risk of becoming victims of domestic violence. Although anyone can be a victim of intimate partner violence, extensive research demonstrates that women are substantially more likely to be victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, and Centers for Disease Control studies all conclude that victims of intimate partner violence are overwhelmingly female.

- While a recent study reports that 73% of family violence victims are women, it also notes that women compose 84% of spouse abuse victims and 86% of victims of abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>1</sup>
- Women are almost six times as likely as men to be a victim of rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>
- Women are 3.5 times more likely to be stalked in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>
- Women are seven to fourteen times more likely to report severe violence by an intimate partner – beat them, choked or tried to drown them, threatened them with a gun, or actually used a gun on them.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly 75% of murder victims killed by an intimate partner are women.<sup>5</sup>
- While the number of male victims killed by an intimate partner fell an average of 4% per year from 1976-1998, the number of female victims killed only fell an average of 1% per year.<sup>6</sup>
- In terms of victimization, intimate partner violence against men is overwhelming committed in same-sex relationships rather than in heterosexual relationships.<sup>7</sup>

Most studies that report equal rates of victimization typically use the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), which is severely flawed.<sup>8</sup>

- The CTS ignores the context, motivations, meanings, and consequences of intimate partner abuse. Surveys that use the CTS generally count the raw number of violent acts committed while ignoring the reasons why people use violence. Many women resort to violence to defend themselves against the aggression of their male partners, while men generally use violence in order to control their female partners.<sup>9</sup>
- The CTS uses a focused, singular approach that often does not uncover the complete picture of violence and results in misleading statistics about the incidence and frequency of abuse of women as compared to men.<sup>10</sup>

The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) is sometimes used to support the claim that 1/3 of domestic violence victims are male. This interpretation of the data is misleading.

- The data used are meant to determine how many men and women are victims, but are not reliable in determining the *percentage* of victims that are of either sex.<sup>11</sup>
- The survey is not designed to allow accurate analysis of the demographics of victims. Surveys that are designed for that purpose, such as evidence from emergency rooms, police reports, and court records, suggest that approximately 5 – 7% of victims of domestic violence are men.<sup>12</sup>
- The NVAWS plainly states that women are significantly more likely to be victims of domestic violence.<sup>13</sup>

The language of the Violence Against Women Act is gender neutral. Funds are available under VAWA for services provided to victims regardless of gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew R. Durose et al., U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Family Violence Statistics: Including Statistics on Strangers and Acquaintances 1 (June 2005)

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- <sup>2</sup> Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey 13 (Nov. 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey 18 (Nov. 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Research in Brief: Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey 7 (Nov. 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Callie Marie Rennison, Ph.D. & Sarah Welchans, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Intimate Partner Violence 1 (May 2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Callie Marie Rennison, Ph.D. & Sarah Welchans, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Intimate Partner Violence 1 (May 2000).
- <sup>7</sup> Stephan S. Owen & Tod W. Burke, *An Exploration of the Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Same-Sex Relationships*, 95 Psychological Reports, Aug. 2004, at 129.
- <sup>8</sup> Murray A. Straus & Richard J. Gelles, Physical Violence in American Families (1990); Lisa Brush, *Violent Acts and Injurious Outcomes in Married Couples: Methodological Issues in the National Survey of Families and Households*, Gender & Society, Mar. 1990, at 56; A. L. Cantos, P.H. Neidig, & K.D. O'Leary *Injuries of Women and Men in a Treatment Program for Domestic Violence*, Journal of Family Violence, 1994, at 113; Johnson, 1995; B.J. Morse, *Beyond the Conflict Tactics Scale: Assessing Gender Differences in Partner Violence*, Violence and Victims, Winter 1995, at 251.
- <sup>9</sup> Walter S. DeKeseredy, Ph.D. & Martin D. Schwartz, Ph.D., Measuring the Extent of Woman Abuse in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships: A Critique of the Conflict Tactics Scales 2 (1998).
- <sup>10</sup> Walter S. DeKeseredy, Ph.D. & Martin D. Schwartz, Ph.D., Measuring the Extent of Woman Abuse in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships: A Critique of the Conflict Tactics Scales 2-3, 4 (1998).
- <sup>11</sup> Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Research in Brief: Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey 7 (Nov. 1998).
- <sup>12</sup> R. Emerson Dobash et al., *The myth of sexual symmetry in marital violence*, 39 Social Problems, 1992, at 71; Michael P. Johnson, *Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two Forms of Violence Against Women*, Journal of Marriage and the Family, May 1995, at 283; Maureen McLeod, *Women Against Men: An Examination of Domestic Violence Based on an Analysis of Official Data and National Victimization Data*, Justice Quarterly, 1984, at 171; Heather C. Melton & Joanne Belknap, *He hits, She Hits: Assessing Gender Differences and Similarities in Officially Reported Intimate Partner Violence*, Criminal Justice and Behavior, June 2003, at 328; D.G. Saunders, *When Battered Women Use Violence: Husband-Abuse or Self-Defense?*, Violence and Victims, Spring 1986, at 47.
- <sup>13</sup> Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Research in Brief: Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey 6 (Nov. 1998).