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Identification of Domestic Violence as a Social Problem

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Social problem

People experiencing domestic violence in the United States are subject to more severe instances of violence due to easy access to weapons, a lack of supportive resources, and poor law enforcement practices.

Scope and magnitude

In this paper, the social problem is referred to as domestic violence. Recently there have been proposals of alternative terms such as intimate partner violence, domestic terrorism, or gender-based violence (The Language We Use, 2022). Similarly, the terms victims and abusers are used in this paper. There is much valuable discussion over domestic violence terminology, but that is a subject for a different paper.

The scope and magnitude of domestic violence is difficult to quantify. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence provides numerous helpful statistics, including the following (NCADV: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2022):

- "1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking"
- "The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%"
- "45.1% of Black women and 40.1% of Black men have experienced intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes"
- "Gender-based violence is more prevalent (and more violent/causes more severe injuries) in rural communities than in urban and suburban communities"
- "55.5% of Native women experience physical intimate partner violence in their lifetimes; 66.6% experience psychological abuse"
- "Between 21-60% of victims of intimate partner violence lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse"

Everytown for Gun Safety released a report in 2017 asserting that 54% of mass shootings involved an element of domestic violence (Women and Children in the Crosshairs, 2017). This point can be connected to the tragedies such as the Sandy Hook massacre, which left 28 people dead and began with the gunman killing his mother, or the massacre at the First Baptist Church in Sugarland Springs which left 26 people dead and began with the gunman assaulting his wife (Snyder 7).

Root causes

It is challenging to restrict weapons access because there are organized and well-funded political structures in place designed to prevent this (McDermott and Jones, 2022). Despite evidence to the contrary, there is a deeply entrenched belief that the biggest threat to personal safety looms outside the home (tyrannical governments, stranger rape, thieves), and thus arming citizens/ the home increases personal safety (Ausman and Faria, 2019). These beliefs originally planted and now maintain the social and political barriers to weapons restriction (Gutowski, 2021).

Successful domestic violence recovery often requires more resources than are currently available to many victims. Protection orders do little to protect against immediate physical harm (Albrecht, 2012). Shelters often cut off a victim from their resources and support network, and the time restrictions offer a temporary respite (Snyder 226). Successful domestic violence resource programs require a multifaceted approach including multiyear housing, vocational training, education access for children, mental health, etc. (Snyder 230). These are not funding priorities due to belief that battered women are responsible for their victimhood and thus responsible for their own recovery (Walker, 1987).

Law enforcement is one of the first institutions to interact with domestic violence dynamics, as often police have been understood to be the solution to violence (Sibarium, 2021). But law enforcement officers are rarely prepared to offer victims a viable path to safety (Boyd-Barrett, 2021). Officers are trained to respond to 'events' of domestic violence, which leads to a conceptualization of the social problem as

pattern of dangerous events, sandwiched by periods in which the victim could be free to exercise agency should they so choose (Snyder 157). Research on domestic violence describes instead a process of isolation from resources, dehumanization, and the building of tension (Power and Control Wheel, 2021).

Positive and negative effects

One theory is that the abuser in a domestic violence relationship batters to maintain a sense of identity through asserting power and control (Walker, 1987). This does not benefit the abuser in the long run, but maintaining dominance serves as an avoidance strategy for the batterer's anxiety. The negative impacts on victims are difficult to quantify, and vary based on the situation, but may include emotional trauma, debt and/or financial distress, physical injury, loss of housing stability, loss of close relationships, and loss of life (NCADV: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2022).

Personal interest

Domestic violence is a wildly misunderstood social problem that I feel the government is responsible for preventing. So much of human behavior is predictable; we know how people's environment and resources affects their actions. We know how to prevent domestic violence, yet because many people believe that domestic violence is an inevitable outlier present in all societies, there isn't the political will necessary to combat this abuse. Domestic violence lies at the intersection of gun ownership, access, community relationships with police, and cultural understandings of gender and trauma. These are all social aspects we have control over, we need more research to understand how shifting these dynamics impacts domestic violence, and we have a responsibility to make our communities safer if and when we are able.

Symbol(s)

A commonly held image of the domestic violence relationship is the story of the helpless woman and the out-of-control man. Neither of these characters come out as heroes, but the out-of-control man typically elicits disgust while and helpless woman elicits pity. An example of this dynamic is Chuck Traynor and Linda Susan Boreman, whose story is depicted in the 2013 movie, *Lovelace* (*Lovelace - Movie Synopsis, Summary, Plot & Film Details*). Another common story trope is the defense that ‘they both hit each other.’ This is often used as an explanation for battering behavior and functions to muddle the victim/abuser narrative. A well known example of this defense being used was during the OJ Simpson trial (Marshall and Hobbes, 2019).

Synecdoche is used often in stories of domestic violence, especially for stories that are receive mass media attention. Chris Brown’s widely publicized physical assault of Rihanna in 2009 still lingers in the public’s mind, falsely touting the narrative that all cases of serious domestic violence involve visible brutality (Team Grazia, 2021).

Applicable policy

The Federal Violence Against Women Act, implemented 1994, addresses this social problem. VAWA was reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013 (The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund, “Legal Momentum”). VAWA lapsed in 2019 (Klar, 2020), but was reintroduced and reauthorized in 2022 (Fact Sheet: Reauthorization of the Violence against Women Act (VAWA), 2022).

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