

Learn how to recognize, intervene in domestic violence cases

October 1 2014, by Annemarie Mountz

As recently as 40 years ago, domestic violence often was not considered a crime, even by law enforcement and the judicial system. Victims had little or no resources to help them escape the violence aimed at them and their children by a spouse or domestic partner.

Today, the national [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#) that was passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000, 2005 and 2013 holds offenders accountable for their crimes and provides services to the victims of such violence.

The legislation has led to a [decrease of intimate partner violence](#), and an increase in the reporting of domestic and relationship violence to police. Still, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to [women](#) – more than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. In addition, many people remain unaware of what constitutes domestic violence.

October has been designated National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. A goal of the monthlong campaign is to not only raise awareness of this crime, but also to empower everyone to take steps to end it.

"Domestic and relationship violence is the willful intimidation, assault, battery, sexual assault or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another," said Sgt. Frances Pollack, crime prevention and community education officer with the Penn State University Police. She offered several questions that help to define the crime:

Does your partner ever...

- Embarrass you with put-downs?
- Control what you do, who you see or talk to or where you go?
- Act in ways that scare you?
- Push, slap, choke or hit you?
- Control the money in your relationship?
- Make all the decisions?
- Prevent you from working or going to class?
- Act like the abuse is no big deal, deny the abuse or tell you it's your fault?
- Threaten to hurt himself or herself?
- Destroy property, abuse or threaten to abuse or kill pets?

"If you were able to answer yes to any of these questions, you may be in an abusive relationship," Pollack said.

The crime is more prevalent than people might imagine. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:

- One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- Women comprise 85 percent of domestic violence victims.
- Historically, females have been most often victimized by someone they knew.
- Females who are 20-24 years of age are at the greatest risk of nonfatal [intimate partner violence](#).
- Most cases of [domestic violence](#) are never reported to the police.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline reports that domestic and relationship violence occurs to 24 people per minute, or 1 every 2.5

seconds. That amounts to more than 12 million women and men being victimized over the course of a year.

Pollack said that women ages 16 to 24 experienced the highest rate of [intimate partner](#) violence, and violent behavior typically begins between the ages of 12 and 18. "Those figures drive home the fact that domestic and [relationship violence](#) is present in university settings nationwide," she said.

Pollack said that only 33 percent of teens who were in a violent relationship ever told anyone about the abuse. As high as 53 percent of college students have experienced at least one incident of dating violence, and 50 percent to 75 percent of college-aged females reported to have experienced some form of sexual aggression in dating relationships.

"It is important to remember that no one is ever responsible for a partner's violent behavior, and victims are never responsible for crimes committed against them," said Peggy Lorah, director of the Center for Women Students at Penn State. "Whether we know it or not, each of us knows someone who is dealing with this issue. As members of the Penn State community, we can set a standard that says [interpersonal violence](#) is never OK."

Lorah said that if abuse is suspected, acknowledge it in a supportive, non-judgmental way. "Say, 'I see what is happening, and I want to help in any way that works for you,' rather than, 'This is none of my business,'" Lorah said. "By being active bystanders, we can save lives."

Nearly 60 percent of college students said they don't know how to help someone who is in an abusive relationship. Penn State Police and the Center for Women Students offer these tips:

- Set up a time to talk, and let your friend know you're concerned about her safety.
- Be supportive. Offer specific help.
- Don't place shame, blame or guilt on your friend.
- Help your friend make a safety plan.
- Encourage your friend to talk to someone who can help.
- If your friend decides to stay, continue to be supportive.
- Encourage your friend to do things outside of the relationship.
- If your friend decides to leave, continue to offer support.
- Keep in mind that you can't "rescue" your friend, but let your friend know that you will always be there no matter what.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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