

Report recommends ways to break cycle of domestic violence

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Leana Bouffard is the Director of the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University. Credit: Harriet McHale/SHSU

Victims of domestic violence are hindered from leaving their abusers by internal and external factors, including the response of the criminal justice system, fear, perceived control, and self-esteem, according to the latest report from the Crime Victims' Institute.

The report, "Breaking the Cycle of Intimate Partner Violence," is designed to provide criminal justice professionals with information about the factors that influence a victim's willingness to leave an abusive relationship or to prosecute their abuser. The report also highlights coordinated community responses and domestic violence courts that address some of these concerns.

"Domestic violence has historically been viewed as a family matter that should be settled within the home," said Leana Bouffard of Sam Houston State University, co-author of the study with graduate student Amanda Goodson. "As research shows 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have suffered from some type of [physical violence](#) from an intimate partner, and new statutes and legislation increasingly criminalize the behavior. Yet few cases of domestic violence are processed within the criminal justice system."

The biggest external factors that influence the victim's decision to leave are the criminal justice system, including the lengthy process, police attitudes and procedures, the removal of the offender, and the lack of social support. Internal factors that weigh on victims include increased levels of fear; negative emotions such as guilt, shame, helplessness, and embarrassment; or mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Victim services, such as advocacy centers, hotlines, shelters, crisis centers and counseling, are important elements in the process to reduce violence, develop coping skills, improve decision-making, and enhance safety planning. A comprehensive community response should include many agencies, including victim services, medical, [mental health](#), and [criminal justice](#), to provide wraparound services for the victims.

Many domestic violence courts have adopted these key elements such as interagency collaboration; comprehensive victim advocacy; effective pre- and post-arrest procedures; multi-agency intakes; effective prosecution, defense and judicial reviews; active treatment program; and integrated data collection and distribution. Domestic violence courts also provide centralized intake; separate calendars for petition for civil protection orders and domestic violence case; and housing units for domestic violence victims.

"It might be difficult to achieve all of these components, however, courts and agencies should strive to accomplish these components for a more effective approach to fighting [domestic violence](#)," Bouffard said.

"Furthermore, research suggests that it is critical for communities to evaluate the appropriate resources and the needs of each agency and court to ensure success within the justice system and the community."

More information: "Breaking the Cycle of Intimate Partner Violence" is available from the Crime Victims' Institute at www.crimevictimsinstitute.org/publications/

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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