



Domestic Violence

in Multnomah County

Multnomah County Health Department
Portland Multnomah Progress Board
Portland Police Bureau
Multnomah County Domestic Violence Coordinator's Office



Domestic violence is a serious problem that affects every community.

Women's advocates in local, state, national, and international settings have recognized the impact of this form of violence for decades. As a result of their perseverance, government, the faith community, providers of health and social services, and many other organizations have begun to respond.

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and the Portland City Council identified the reduction of domestic violence as an urgent benchmark in 1994.

Despite the importance of the problem, our knowledge about the actual occurrence of violence against women by intimate partners in Multnomah County has been limited. We have only been able to make estimates from reports made to emergency systems, the police, and selected national studies. Our communities need more information about the local prevalence of domestic violence to create more effective prevention and intervention approaches, and make informed decisions about allocating resources.

To get better local information, Multnomah County Health Department, the Portland Multnomah Progress Board, Portland Police Bureau, and the County's Domestic Violence Coordinator's Office joined together to conduct a county-wide study on the occurrence, nature and effects of violence against women by intimate partners in Multnomah County. Interviews with women were completed in early 1999.

This report summarizes the findings of the study, and also makes recommendations based on the findings. Some additional information in this report is based on a similar statewide study done in 1998. The findings of the Multnomah County and statewide studies are consistent.

Definitions & Measurement



Domestic violence is "...a pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship."¹ Intimate relationships include marriages, couples living together, and dating relationships. The pattern of coercive behavior in domestic violence is intentional, and can include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. These types of abuse are used to produce fear, which allows the perpetrator to control the victim. While both women and men can be victims of domestic violence, in the overwhelming majority of cases, men commit the violence against women. Therefore, in this study we measured violence against women that was committed by an intimate partner.

Although control is central to domestic violence, it is difficult to measure quantitatively, particularly in a telephone survey. For the purposes of this study, we have defined domestic violence more narrowly as physical or sexual violence committed against women by an intimate partner. We recognize that this approach does not measure emotional abuse or economic control, and as a result, may underestimate the occurrence of domestic violence.

How Was This Study Carried Out?

This study was based on the *1998 Oregon Domestic Violence Needs Assessment*,² designed and conducted by Program Design and Evaluation Services of the Oregon Health Division and Multnomah County Health Department.

Telephone interviews were conducted with a total of 739 women 18-64 years old who live in Multnomah County. The women interviewed were selected to be representative of all women aged 18-64 in the county. Interviews were conducted in late 1998 and early 1999 by a research firm with expertise in health surveys.

The table below provides examples of the types and severity of physical abuse as assessed by the study. It is important to realize that moderate abuse is significant violence, and can be as physically and emotionally damaging as severe abuse.

The study was designed to estimate *physical abuse*, which includes assault, sexual coercion, and injury. The survey instrument employed the *Conflict Tactics Scales 2* to measure physical abuse.³

Examples of Physical Abuse

| | Assault | Sexual Coercion | Injury |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| Severe Physical Abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a knife or gun Punching Kicking Hitting with an object that can injure Choking Slamming against a wall Burning or scalding on purpose | Forcing someone to have sex by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a weapon Hitting Holding them down Using threats of violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being knocked unconscious Broken bones Damage to the face, eyes, ears or teeth Needing hospital treatment Going to see a doctor Needing to see a doctor (without seeing one) |
| Moderate Physical Abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throwing an object that can injure Arm twisting Hair pulling Pushing, shoving or grabbing Slapping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insisting (without the use of physical force) on sex or types of sexual contact against a person's wishes Forcing someone to have sex without a condom (when she wanted to use one) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sprain A bruise A small cut Having physical pain that persisted the next day Deep scratches or cuts Extreme soreness or pain |

Findings & Recommendations



There is truly an epidemic
of domestic violence in
Multnomah County.

The size and nature of the problem demands that we make addressing and preventing domestic violence a high priority in our community.

One of every seven women aged 18-64 was physically abused by an intimate partner during the past year. This means that almost 28,000 women in Multnomah County (13.9%) were physically abused by their partners during the past year. In comparison, many diseases are considered to be epidemic when they affect one of every 500 to 1,000 people.

Women experienced a range of violent acts.

Assault was the most common form of abuse. One of every nine women in Multnomah County was assaulted during the past year (21,700 or 10.9%). One of fourteen women was sexually coerced (13,900 or 7.0%), and one of 20 was injured as a result of domestic violence (10,200 or 5.1%). One-third of physically abused women were both assaulted and sexually coerced.

The high level of domestic violence in Multnomah County is not unique.

While rates of abuse in Multnomah County are high, they are comparable to those for the state of Oregon as a whole, and for the nation. For example, the rate of assault (one of the three types of abuse measured) in Multnomah County was 10.9%. This compares with 9.9% for Oregon as a whole, and with national studies finding rates of 8.4 to 12.1%.^{2, 4, 5, 6}

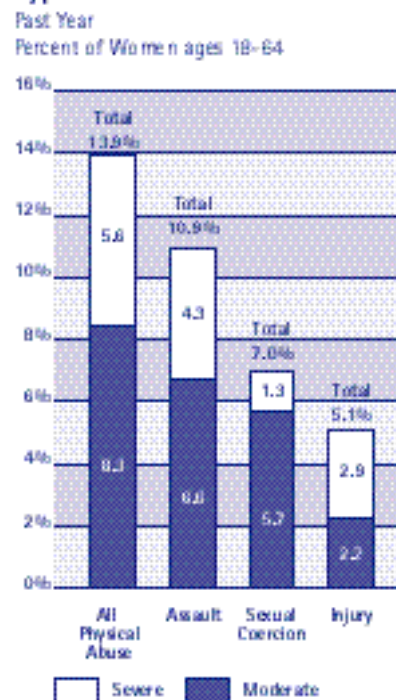
Domestic violence is serious violence.

Forty percent of the women who experienced physical abuse during the past year were severely abused. More than a third of women abused in the past year (37%) suffered an injury from their abuse.

Patterns of abuse vary.

Some women experienced abuse often; for others it was infrequent. As shown in the graph below, about half of abused women experienced four or fewer acts of violence (e.g., hitting, kicking, shoving) in the past year. In contrast, nearly a third said there were times when they were abused at least once a week when the violence was at its peak.

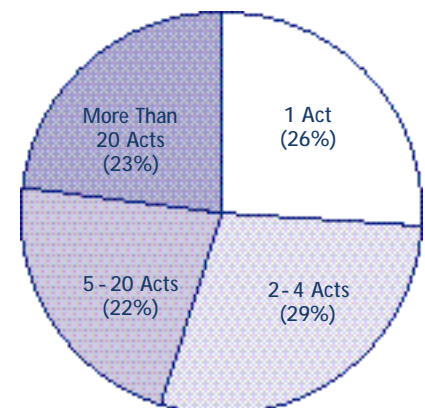
Types and Rates of Abuse



recommendations

To be effective in responding to a problem of this size and severity, our community must:

- Use a comprehensive and coordinated approach.
- Honor and expand on the work that local domestic violence advocates and service providers have carried out over the past 30 years.
- Work with the many different segments of our community to develop and put in place new approaches.
- Increase public and private funding to prevent domestic violence and address its impacts.



Number of Violent Acts

(Women Abused in the Past Year)

A large number of children in Multnomah County are exposed to domestic violence each year. Exposure to violence in the home can have a negative impact on the development and health of children.



21,000 children in Multnomah County were exposed to domestic violence last year.

This estimate of the number of children who saw or heard acts of domestic violence is based on statewide data.

Young children are especially affected.

Half of children exposed to domestic violence were under five years old when they first witnessed this violence.

Two-thirds of the children who saw or heard acts of domestic violence witnessed it at least once a month.

Other research has shown that domestic violence has significant negative impacts on children in the household. These children are more likely to be physically or sexually abused by a parent or be unintended victims of a physical assault.⁷ They sometimes exhibit psychological or behavioral problems as a result of witnessing abuse.⁸

recommendations

To address the impact of domestic violence on children, we must:

- Ensure that people who work with children:
 - Know how to identify children exposed to violence,
 - Take steps to increase the safety of these children, and
 - Know what services and resources are appropriate to help address the negative impacts caused by children's exposure to domestic violence.
- Expand services to address the emotional and developmental needs of children exposed to domestic violence.

Domestic violence affects all parts of our community. However, some populations of women experience more violence than others, and some populations of men are more likely to be abusers than others.

Responding to these populations presents unique opportunities and challenges for prevention and intervention.

Abused women represent a cross-section of the community.

Most are white (84%), over two-thirds (70%) are employed, two-thirds have at least some college education, two-thirds are single, and half have children. Abused women are not necessarily poor—half have incomes of more than \$25,000 per year. While victims reflect the population of women in the broader community, certain groups are over-represented. Women who are young, unmarried, poor, have children, and have problems with alcohol or drugs are more likely to have been physically abused during the past year than are women without these characteristics.

Violence by intimate partners has an enormous impact on young women.

A third of young women (18-24 years old) experienced physical abuse in the past year. For the most part, this violence was committed by men of the same age. As is true for women in other age groups, nearly 40% of young women who were abused experienced severe violence.

Men who commit domestic violence are also from all parts of our community, but differ in some ways from partners who do not abuse.

In this study, 97% of abused women reported that they were abused by a male intimate partner. Most of these men are white (73%), and over two-thirds (68%) are employed. However, men who abuse tend to have less education, are more likely to be unemployed, and are more likely to have a problem with abuse of alcohol or drugs than men who do not abuse. Fifty-six percent of men who abuse were described as having either an alcohol or drug problem (compared to 19% of partners of women who have never been abused).

The factors described above for both men and women do not cause abuse. However, the community needs to recognize these factors in designing services, supports, and interventions for specific groups in the community.

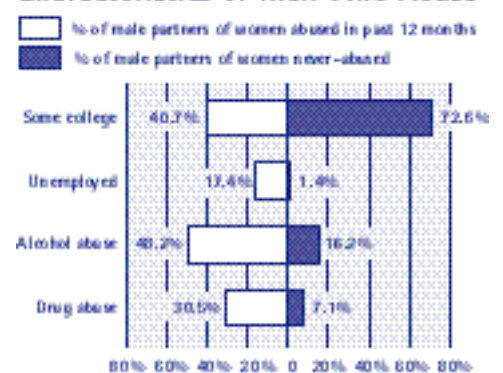
recommendations

Strategies for intervention and prevention must be directed at both the community as a whole and at identified groups.

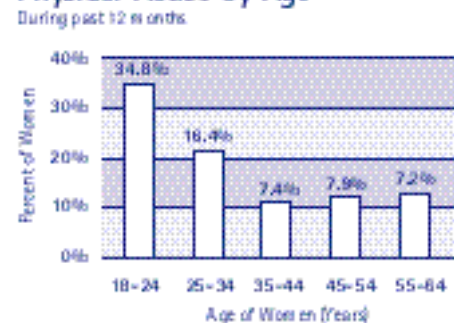
In particular, we must:

- Develop large-scale prevention approaches directed at young men and women.
- Develop school policies and activities that promote non-violent and non-abusive relationships between men and women.
- Enhance services for men who abuse their domestic partners to prevent future acts of violence.
- Assure that health and social service providers recognize the overlap between domestic violence and abuse of alcohol and drugs, and respond appropriately in planning and providing services.

Characteristics of Men Who Abuse



Physical Abuse by Age



Abused women gain support and deal with the effects of domestic violence in a variety of ways. They seek help from natural networks—friends, family, co-workers and supervisors—as well as from social service, law enforcement and health providers. There are tremendous opportunities, both through professional providers and natural support networks, to expand and create new approaches to addressing domestic violence.

Women seek and receive different combinations of support, information and immediate help from various people and agencies.

Both the statewide and county studies suggest there is a need to increase the variety of services available, and improve the community's ability to respond and provide assistance.

Friends and family are the most common source of support.

Statewide data show that 80% of women turned to friends and family for help. Although most women received support from friends and family, relatively few received information about services or immediate help.

The workplace is an important source of support.

Almost 40% of abused women said they sought support from supervisors or co-workers. As was true for friends and family, co-workers and supervisors were good at providing support, but less effective in providing information about services or offering immediate help.

Women seek help from domestic violence agencies, law enforcement, and health systems more selectively.

About one-third of women abused in the past ten years called the police, and one-fifth sought a restraining order.

Only one in four talked with their health provider about the domestic violence, while one in seven called a crisis line.

recommendations

To more effectively address the occurrence and impact of partner violence, our community must:

- Develop prevention and intervention approaches that take advantage of natural community networks and systems—friends and family, employers, health care providers, places of worship, and other community institutions.
- Enhance the availability and variety of services for victims of domestic violence.



Footnotes

1. Oregon Domestic Violence Council. *A Collaborative Approach to Domestic Violence, Oregon Protocol Handbook*.
2. Glick, B., Johnson S., Pham C. 1998 *Oregon Domestic Violence Needs Assessment—A Report to the Oregon Governor’s Council on Domestic Violence*.
3. Straus, M.A., Hamby, S.L., Boney-McCoy, S., & Sugarman, D.B. (1996). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). *Journal of Family Issues*, 17 (3), 283-316.
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5. Strauss, M.A. and Gelles, R.J. (Eds.) (1990). *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press.
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8. Kolbo, J.R., Blakely, E.H., & Engleman, D. (1996). Children who witness domestic violence: A review of empirical literature. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11 (2), 281-293.

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