

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE FACTS

Gender-based violence impacts the lives of countless women and their families across the United States. Women and girls of all ages, income levels, racial and ethnic communities, sexual orientations and religious affiliations experience violence in the form of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, trafficking, and stalking. The enactment of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 provided a national, streamlined response to how communities respond to violence against women by giving law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges the tools they need to hold offenders accountable and keep communities safe while supporting victims. VAWA serves as a vital funding source for YWCAs and other organizations that provide critical services directly to victims of abuse and sexual assault.

Victims of violence face many barriers to accessing resources and safety. Women of color and other marginalized populations experience disproportionate experiences of violence and increased barriers in seeking help. These barriers include fear of criminal justice systems; lack of a financial safety nets; religious and cultural barriers; fear of deportation; lack of awareness or knowledge of the legal system; lack of adequate childcare services; lack of low-cost housing options; and skepticism of social service institutions. While many of the experiences of survivors cut across all racial, ethnic, and class lines, due to complex histories with these systems, some survivors face increased difficulty in finding support.

Many of these barriers stem from long-standing inequity in public policies and social safety nets. At YWCA, we know that all violence is not acknowledged or responded to equally and that some victims go unrecognized altogether. That is why we firmly support legislation that is comprehensive and inclusive of the needs of all victims of gender-based violence, particularly those who face increased barriers to safety, such as Native women, immigrant women, communities of color, and those with multiple marginalized identities.

FACTS

Gender-based violence continues to be a pervasive problem in the United States, with far-reaching consequences.

- Every 90 seconds, another American is sexually assaulted.ⁱ
- Out of every 1000 cases of rape, only 57 lead to an arrest, 11 are referred to prosecutors, and 7 lead to a felony conviction.ⁱⁱ
- Only half of domestic violence incidents are reported to police.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 1 in 3 girls is a victim of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse in the United States.^{iv}

- 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence and, on average, more than 3 women are murdered by their current or former partners in the United States every day.^v
- 1 of every 4 homeless women is homeless because of violence committed against her,^{vi} and over 92% of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime.^{vii}
- Victims of domestic violence lose about 8 million days of paid work per year because of the violence that they experienced.^{viii}
- 81% of all women have experienced street harassment. Among all women, 49% have been sexually touched, 27% been followed, and 23% have survived sexual assault.^{ix}
- Food service and hospitality workers report the highest levels of sexual harassment in the workplace and often have the least amount of employment protections.^x

Gender-based violence occurs across all races, ages, classes, and ethnic backgrounds, though at disparate rates and with disproportionate impacts for women of color.

- A lack of job stability, unemployment, the nation's history of segregation, and the strain of navigating racism help to explain some of the factors leading to high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in communities of color. They also help to explain why women and families of color, who are more likely to live in poverty, have fewer resources available to help them leave violent situations or to seek care for the violence they have suffered.^{xi}
- Native Americans are victims of rape or sexual assault at 2.5 times the rate of other racial groups.^{xii} In fact, more than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime. This includes 56.1% who have experienced sexual violence, 55.5% who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, 48.8% who have experienced stalking, and 66.4% who have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner.^{xiii}
- Black women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at a rate 19% higher than that of White women.^{xiv} 45% of Black women experience physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetimes, compared with 37.3% of all women.^{xv}
- Additionally, Black women are at an especially high risk of homicide by men compared with all women. In 2015, Black women were 2.5 times more likely to be murdered by men than White women: 92% of Black female victims were killed by men they knew, and 56% were killed by current or former intimate partners. In cases where the murder weapon was identified, 59% of Black female victims were shot and killed with guns.^{xvi}

- Survivors of domestic violence and low-income Black women experience heightened risk of criminalization. From the “War or Drugs” to the sexual abuse-to-prison pipeline, Black women and girls are more likely to have interactions with criminal justice systems as a result of their experiences of trauma. More than 90% of girls in juvenile justice systems self-disclose trauma.^{xvii} In fact, justice-involved girls are victimized by sexual violence at an earlier average age, and for a longer average duration, than other forms of abuse.^{xviii}
- In an ongoing study conducted by Black Women’s Blueprint, 60% of Black girls will experience sexual abuse before the age of 18.^{xix}
- Statistics indicate that 21–55% of Asian and Pacific Islander (A/PI) women report experiencing intimate physical and/or sexual violence during their lifetime.^{xx} A/PI survivors are more likely to experience abuse from multiple family members, including a spouse, and in-laws than other survivors. 13% of Asian/Asian American women identified in-laws as the persons committing the abuse for which they sought help from a domestic violence program. This proportion is higher than those found for other groups: 4% for Hispanic/Latinx women, 3% for White women, and 1% for African American/Black women.^{xxi}
- Approximately 1 in 3 Hispanic/Latinx women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime^{xxii} and 1 in 12 of Hispanic/Latinx women experienced this violence in the previous 12 months.^{xxiii} Additionally, a national study found 63.1% of Latinx women who identified being victimized in their lifetime reported having experienced more than one victimization.^{xxiv}

Newly-arrived immigrant survivors may face additional forms of abuse that women of color and Native women born in the United States may not, including:

- threats of deportation despite immigration status
- possible language barriers
- lack of knowledge of the American legal system
- threats to report employment status if the survivor works “under the table”
- threats to deport her and keep the children
- withdrawal of petition to complete legalization status
- intimidation by destroying important documents such as an identification card or passport

In addition, there are some barriers that make reaching out for help and obtaining culturally and linguistically-appropriate support services more challenging for many communities of color. Equally as important to note, these barriers are also often seen as factors for resilience, including:

- cultural barriers/resiliencies
- economic barriers, threat of homelessness, job insecurity
- religious barriers/resiliencies
- fear of law enforcement and other systems, including child protective services

ADVOCACY RESPONSES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).
- Ensure that legislation and policies to prevent gender-based violence and to support survivors are inclusive of all victims and survivors including access to VAWA, U Visa, T Visa, and Battered Spouse Waivers.
- Increase collaboration between community service providers and law enforcement to improve justice system responses to survivors.
- Expand the availability of support services for survivors to address unmet needs.
- Expand the list of perpetrators covered by orders of protection to close the loophole that currently permits abusers to access guns.
- Pass safe leave legislation to allow survivors take time off from work without penalty to receive medical attention, make court appearances, seek legal assistance, and get help with safety planning for themselves or immediate family members.
- Ensure that survivors of violence have access to culturally and linguistically-appropriate services.

As the largest network of domestic and sexual violence service providers in the United States, YWCA supports legislation and public policies that protect survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and work to eradicate sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, trafficking in women and girls, and dating violence.

Specifically, we support the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), the Family Violence Prevention Act (FVPSA), and other legislation that is inclusive of the needs of all victims of violence, particularly those who often experience higher risks of violence, such as native women, immigrants, communities of color, and LGBTQ+ survivors.

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