

# Domestic Violence in the United States

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## Abstract

Although the United States is considered to be one of the democratic countries in the world, domestic and family violence still represents an issue of concern in the twenty-first century. According to statistics, about 10 million people are victims of some kind of domestic violence every year (Huecker, King, Jordan, & Smock, 2022). Real statistics, however, might be higher than the official statistics state as some victims do not want or are frightened to talk about it or simply some people do not realize, due to lack of information, that they in reality are the victims of domestic violence. That is the main reason why it is important to raise awareness about this issue. It is important to clearly identify what domestic violence is, what are main signs of domestic violence and what can be done when facing the problem.

**Keywords:** Abuse, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, physical violence, psychological violence.

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## Introduction

### What is Domestic Violence?

According to the United States Department of Justice “*domestic violence*, sometimes called as domestic abuse, family violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) *is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner*” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). Very often people associate the term “domestic violence” with a physical abuse of a wife by a husband, however domestic violence is much wider in its concept. Domestic violence includes not only physical, but also any kind of sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological actions, especially in the twenty-first century, that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship. According to the United States Department of Justice any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone, can be considered as a domestic abuse (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). It is also important to know that “abuser” is not only a husband and “victim” only a wife. Both, men and women, can be “abusers” as well as “victims” and domestic violence may take place in all kind of intimate relationship, often called as IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) both in opposite-sex and same-sex, and can happen to intimate partners who are married, cohabiting, dating, or just sharing a child (Hattery & Earl, 2019). Domestic violence does not have a gender, race, age or religion and it can happen to people of any social background (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Service, 2023). It must be also mentioned that some researchers use term domestic or family violence to refer to any kind of abuse towards any member of the family, however this article concentrates on IPV and in this article domestic violence is used as a term to refer to any kind of abuse towards an intimate partner.

### Signs of Domestic Violence

It is not easy to see domestic violence and it is far more difficult to admit its existence. Many people consider physical abuse as the only or at least the main way of domestic violence. However, there are many other

ways of domestic violence against an intimate partner. As already mentioned above, domestic violence includes not only physical, but also emotional, psychological, economical or technological abuse. Any behavior, that threatens, terrorizes, coerces or wounds a person is an abuse and the case of domestic violence. Very often, victims of domestic violence do not realize that they in reality are suffering from an abuse and that they need a help. That is why the Office on Women's Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offered a list of actions that show the signs of domestic abuse. In this list one may find actions that they would never think are the signs of domestic abuse. According to the OASH a person might be experiencing a domestic violence if her/his partner simply controls what she/he is doing, who she/he is calling, mailing, talking to (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Service, 2023). Yes, my dear readers, if your partner checks and tries to control your social networks without your permission, you are the victim of domestic violence. Or if your partner decides what you wear or do not wear, eat or do not eat, controls your birth control or insists you get pregnant, then yes, you are a victim of domestic abuse. (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Service, 2023) Does your partner prevent or discourage you to study or work? See your friends or family members? Then you are being abused. (Huecker, King, . Jordan, & Smock, 2022) If your partner humiliates you in front of others or accuses you of being unfaithful, then you are being abused. Does your partner force you to have intimate relationship when you do not want to? Does he/she threaten to hurt you or your family members? Or hurt himself or herself because of you? Then yes, you are the victim of domestic violence. (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Service, 2023)

According to the United States Department of Justice, if your partner uses your economic resources, or controls it, you are being abused (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). Are you constantly criticized? Name-called? Is your partner trying to diminish your abilities or damage your relationship with others? Then you are being abused (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

As can be seen from the information above, there are various ways to abuse a partner that many people are not aware of. Many people may have felt uncomfortable but not have realized that controlling their social media is an abuse. In order to diminish the number of domestic abuses, it is crucially important to openly talk about it and to raise awareness about the issue.

### **Historical Overview of Domestic Violence in the United States**

Domestic violence is and has always been a problem in the USA. More than that, for many years abuse of a woman by a husband was not even considered as a criminal act. In Anglo-American legal history physical punishment of a wife by a husband was not recognized as an illegal act, in the contrary it was considered as a commonsensically right to correct a wife (Andrus, 2015). More than that, according to *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* "The wife as long as she lives is subject to the law of her husband" (Andrus, 2015). As husbands were responsible for their wives, it was considered as a direct responsibility of husbands to correct their wives even by using physical punishment. According to Javier and Harrison, who start their book "Understanding Domestic Violence" with a timeline connected with the domestic violence regulations in the United States, in 1910 the U.S. Supreme Court did not support woman's claims against her husband on an assault and battery announcing that "it would open the doors of the courts to accusations of all sorts of one spouse against the other and bring into public notice complaints for assault, slander and libel" (Javier & Herron, 2018). According to the timeline in 1962 domestic violence cases in New York were transferred from Criminal Court to Family Court, where only civil procedures applied and only in 1966 beating became a ground for a woman to divorce abusive husband if "sufficient" number of beatings had taken place (Javier & Herron, 2018). Surprisingly enough, physical punishment of a wife became explicitly illegal in the United States only in the twentieth century and it was not considered to be a police matter until the end of the twentieth century (Andrus, 2015). It must be also mentioned that even after it became illegal to physically

punish a wife, cases of domestic abuse against woman continued but people did not speak about it. Domestic abuse remained "behind doors" and became the subject of gossip among neighbors (Keeling & Mason, 2008). It is also interesting to mention that the Journal of Marriage and the Family, which covered various topics connected with marriage and family issues did not include even one article about violence till the 1970s (Gelles, 1980). First article about family violence against children was actually published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1962 with the title "The Battered Child Syndrome" and majority of the articles about child abuse in the family was written in medical journals (Gelles, 1980). As for the domestic violence against intimate partner, debates and open talk about the issue started after feminist started openly discussing the problem and demonstrated a positive stance towards the Intimate Partner Violence (Keeling & Mason, 2008). The response and reaction towards domestic violence has evolved in the United States after 1970s and nowadays any kind of violence, among them Intimate partner Violence, is the issue of public discourse and domestic violence legislature acquired growing attention and importance (Buzava & Buzava, 2017). The result of the above-mentioned developments was the formation of the refuge movement which provided a safe place for women and their children who escaped family violence. At the same time raising awareness about abusive relationship and informing the general public about the partner abuse and family violence started (Keeling & Mason, 2008).

From the legislative point of view, facilitating an improved response to the domestic violence has been gaining more and more significance since the 1970s. Before that judges and police officers considered wife beating as a trivial offence. According to Javier and Herron police would just ask a husband to calm down and a wife not to annoy a husband and cases rarely came to court (Javier & Herron, 2018). Nowadays all 50 states have domestic violence status in place (Buzava & Buzava, 2017). It must be also mentioned that all states considerable modified the status since its initial enactment and increased the scope of relationship and the types of illegal and unlawful conduct which are subject to criminal section.

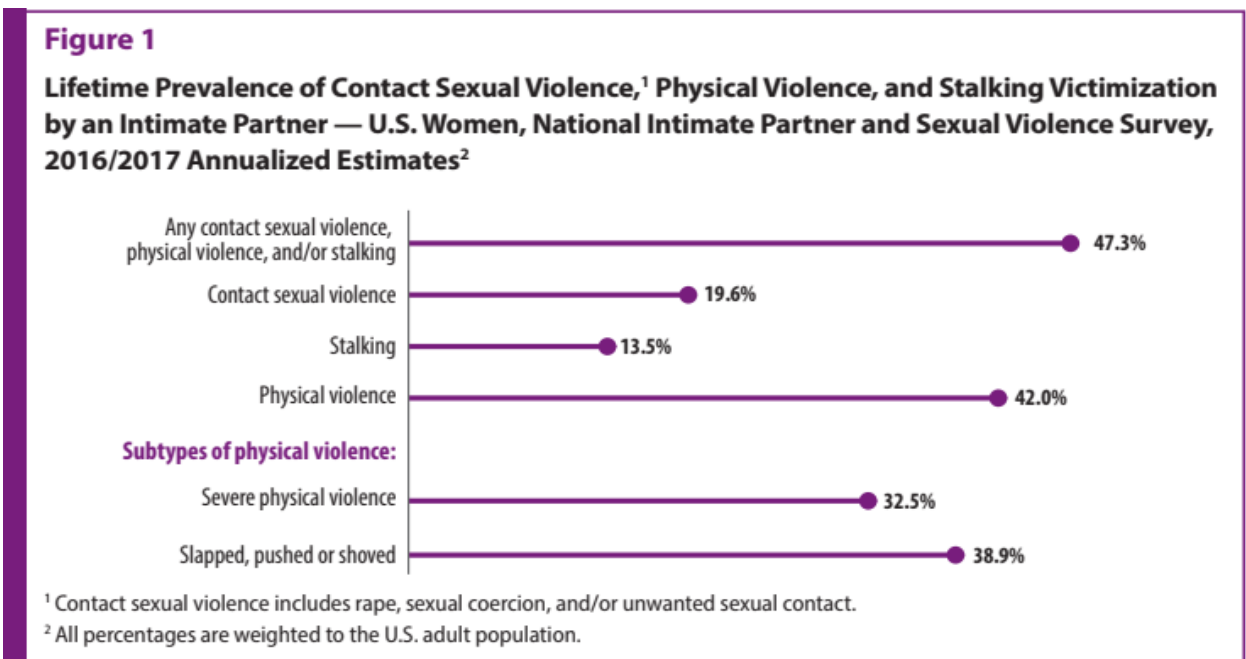
In the initial phase the scope of relationship was limited to marital relationship, however, nowadays status typically include not only the spouse, but also ex-spouse, current or ex-cohabitant, couples dating or sharing a common child, and in many states couples in same-sex relationship. As for the types of illicit conduct, it has also increased and in many states may even include stalking and rape among married couples (Buzava & Buzava, 2017).

### Statistics of the Domestic Violence

It is really difficult to provide the exact statistics on domestic violence as statistics are underreported because of different reasons. However, some research groups and government agencies, like Centers for Disease Control, still manage to the report remarkably stable measures of violence over time. (Hattery & Earl, 2019) According to Hattery and Earl about 25 percent of women and 13.8 percent of men of all race and gender in the USA have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. It must be mentioned that Black and Native American Women are the most vulnerable targets with the highest rates of lethal and near lethal violence including being shot, beaten unconscious and so forth (Hattery & Earl, 2019).

According to the same authors, approximately fifteen hundred women are murdered every year by their intimate or ex-intimate partners, and intimate partner homicide accounts for half of all female homicide. It is also estimated that more than half of all women experience emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse by their partners and 15 percent of women and 6 percent of men report being stalked (Hattery & Earl, 2019).

It is worth highlighting that according to National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) the number of victims of IPV has increased during the last decade. According to NIPSVS report published in 2018 over 1 in 3 (36.4% or 43.6 million) women experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Smith, 2018). The statistics has unfortunately increased up to 47.3% or 59 million (1 in 2 women) in the report published in 2021 (table 1) (Leemis, 2022). According to the same survey physical violence is the most widely violence in intimate partner relationship comprising about 42% in women. (Table 1) As for the types of physical violence, severe physical violence (about 32.5 %) and slapping, pushing or shoving (about 38.9 %) are the most often reported. (Figure 1)

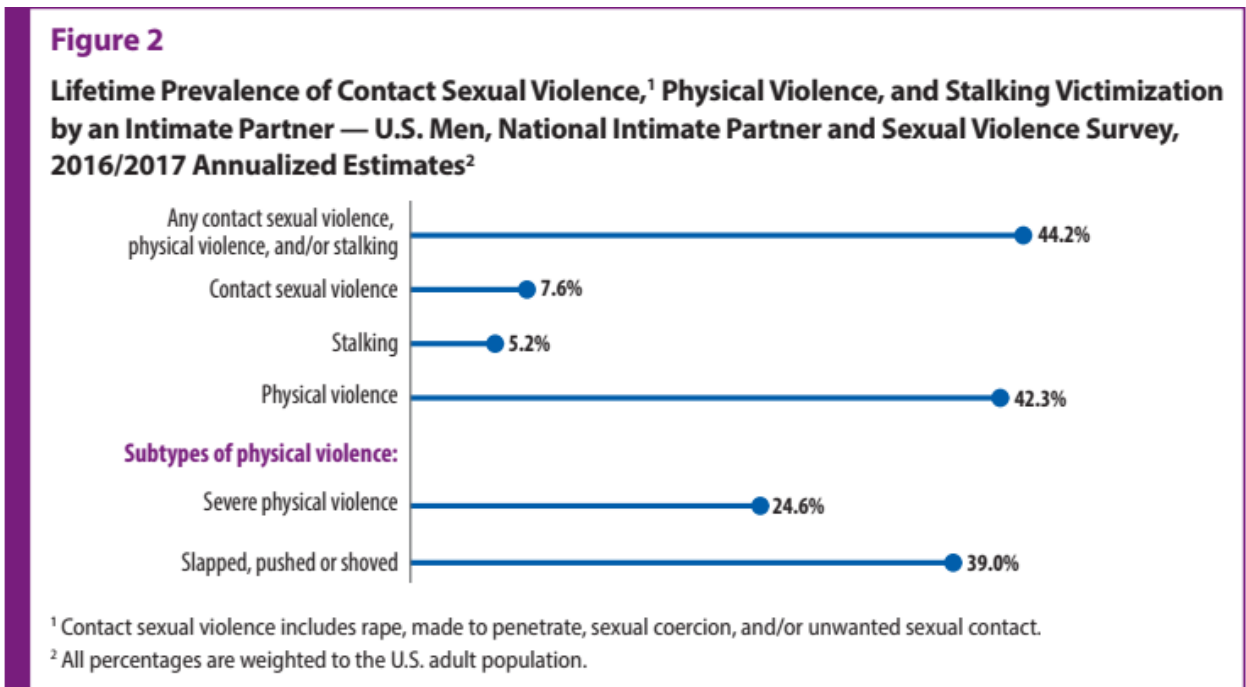


The same trend is noted in case of men. According to the NIPSVS report published in 2018

about 33.6% or 37.3 million (1 in 3) men experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or

stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Smith, 2018). The statistics has increased up to 44.2%

or 52.1 million according to the 2022 survey results (Figure 2) (Leemis, 2022).



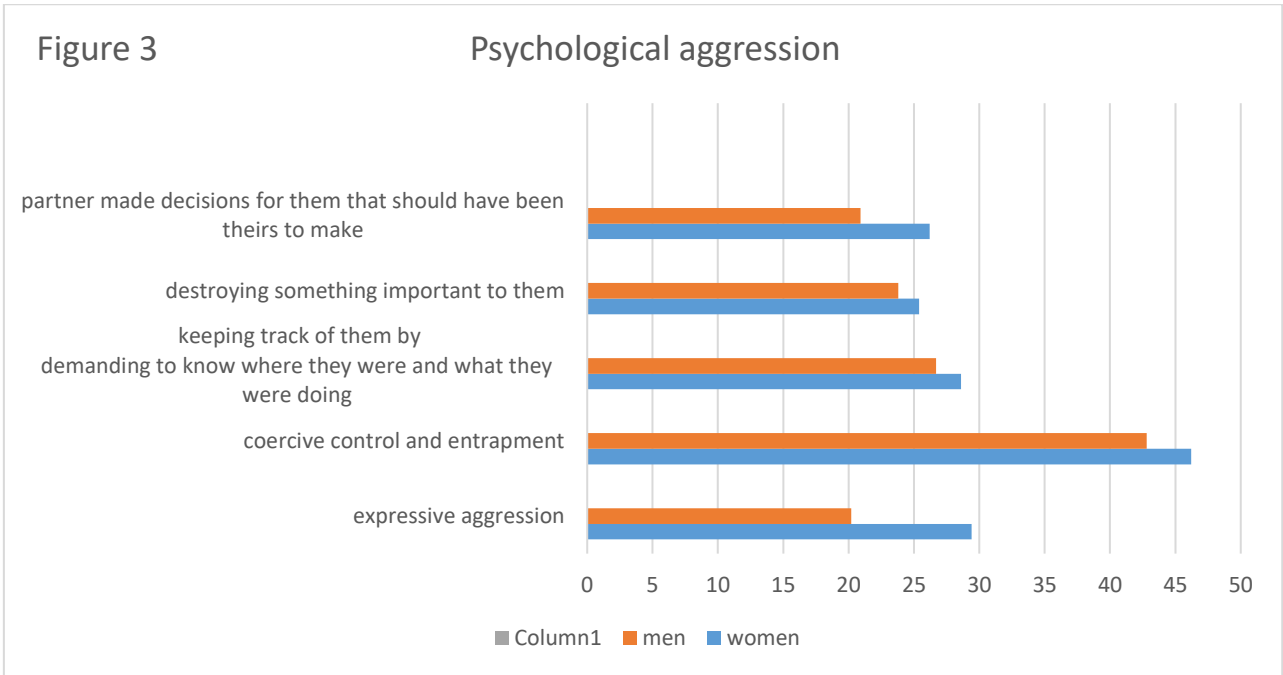
According to the same statistics, stalking (5.2 %) is the least and physical violence (42.3 %) - the most spread way of violence in IPV among men. As for the types of physical violence, severe physical violence represented 24.6 % and slapping, pushing or shoving represented 39% (Leemis, 2022).

As we can see from the statistics, physical violence is the most widely reported violence in both women and men, however, in case of staking and contact sexual violence women seem to be more target victims (Leemis, 2022).

When it comes to psychological aggression, according to NIPSVS 2022 report, approximately 49.4% (61.7 million) women and 45.1% (53.3 million) reported any psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime, which includes expressive aggression, coercive control and entrapment. The most common forms of lifetime coercive control and entrapment by an intimate partner include an intimate

partner keeping track of them by demanding to know where they were and what they were doing, making decisions that should have been theirs to make and destroying something important to them (Leemis, 2022) (figure 3).

As we can see from the statistics, more women (29.4%) than men (20.2%) experienced expressive aggression. As for the coercive control and entrapment, (women 46.2% and men 42.8%) destroying something important (women 25.4 and men 23.8) and keeping track of them by demanding to know where they were and what they were doing (women 28.6% and men 23.8%) statistics are close for both genders. When it comes to making decisions that should have been theirs to make, about 26.2 % of women and 20.9 % of men reported that their intimate partners made decisions instead of them (Leemis, 2022) (figure 3).



**Some Advice for the Victims of Domestic Violence**

U.S. Department of Health & Human Service offers some advice for those people who are in abusive relationship. One option could be leaving abusive relationship. It is not easy to leave an abuser and start a new life, however it is not impossible either. It is not necessary to leave at once, however having safety plan will help a victim to leave the abusive relationship when she/he is ready. And you should not be afraid of starting a new life, as you are not alone. Not only family members and friends will support you to leave abusive relationship safely, but also police, shelter workers and social workers (The U.S Department of Health & Human Service, 2023).

Another, more radical but safe way to get read of an abuser can be getting a protected order or as it is sometimes called restraining order to protect yourself. Restraining order can legally force an abuser to stay physically away from a victim and have no contact with her/him by phone, social media or another person. Restraining order can be one of the best ways to keep a victim safe from a person who hurts her/him and a person who violates a restraining order can be arrested by the police and can be charged with crime (The U.S Department of Health & Human Service, 2023).

U.S. Department of Health & Human Service also offers free and confidential hotlines, such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline, The National Dating Abuse Hotline and the National Sexual Assault Hotline, where any person, who is abused, can call and ask for help (The U.S Department of Health & Human Service, 2023).

**Conclusion**

Millions of people of both genders are abused physically or psychologically by an intimate partner every year and the statistics are unfortunately increasing and increasing. If in the past domestic violence, especially against women, was not seriously taken and was not a subject to the law, nowadays an abuser might be charged with crime and numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations are offering free and anonymous help to the victims of domestic violence. It is not easy to leave an abusive relationship, but with the help of the police and social workers, it is already feasible to get rid of an abuser and start a new life. So, please, if you are abused, do not hesitate and ask for help to have safe and meaningful life.

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