



Domestic Violence and Poverty

Summary

Domestic violence knows no boundaries and affects all segments of the population, regardless of race and socioeconomic status. However, research shows that families experiencing financial strain have a domestic violence rate of 9.5% compared with 2.5% of couples who are not experiencing financial strain¹. This research also shows that the relationship is reciprocal. As explained on VAWnet.org: “While economic stress and hardship may increase the risk of domestic violence, domestic violence may also cause financial problems for DV survivors and entrap them in poverty and an abusive relationship”. Poverty does not cause domestic violence, but can play a significant role in escalating violence and the ability of a victim to leave a violent situation. Poverty also impacts the resources available to a victim such as legal services, access to housing and healthcare services. 98% of victims indicate that financial dependency is a leading reason they stay with their abusers². This dependency is often intentionally created by an abuser by isolating the victim, forbidding the victim from working and taking control of all finances. Leaving an abuser often forces a victim into a situation where they will face poverty and destitution with their children. Even when a victim is employed, abusers can use the justice system as a tactic to force victims to miss work to constantly attend court and jeopardize the victim’s employment³. The intersection of poverty and domestic violence is strong and victims and children experiencing poverty and violence require unique and specialized support.

Public Policy Intervention

Policies are needed to support the financial barriers that victims face in abusive situations and policy makers should understand the intersection of domestic violence and poverty. The Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence supports equal pay legislation and paid sick leave for victims needing to attend court, receive medical care and counseling. The National Network to End Domestic Violence explains, “Limiting survivors’ access to financial resources and employment restricts their ability to regain financial independence and move from short-term safety to long-term stability. In addition, wage discrimination and pay inequality exacerbate financial dependence, creating added barriers to safety and economic independence”⁴. Victims who do not receive paid sick leave to attend court often decide to miss court dates to avoid jeopardizing their employment or losing needed income. This can result in the dismissal of charges and the dissolution of protection orders. The absence of paid sick leave also limits a victim’s ability to receive advocacy and support. These circumstances decrease a victim’s safety and delay a victim’s ability to regain independence from the abuse. Policy makers must also consider the impact that public assistance reductions have on victims. In order to support victims in leaving abuse, Nevada must offer a strong infrastructure for victims to succeed on their own.

¹ Benson and Fox, 2004 as cited in http://www.vawnet.org/applied-research-papers/print-document.php?doc_id=2187

² <http://nnev.org/resources/ejresources/about-financial-abuse.html>

³ http://www.vawnet.org/applied-research-papers/print-document.php?doc_id=2187

⁴ <http://nnev.org/news/4682-still-unequal-on-equal-pay-day.html>