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2-6-2017

Domestic Violence Among Utah Women

Susan R. Madsen
Utah State University, susan.madsen@usu.edu

Tiffany Turley
Brigham Young University

Robbyn T. Scribner
Utah Women Leadership Program

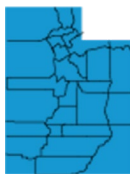Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/marketing_facpub

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Recommended Citation

Madsen, S. R., Turley, T. & Scribner, R. (2017, February 6). Domestic violence among Utah women.Utah Women Stats: Research Snapshot. https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/18.pdf

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Domestic Violence Among Utah Women

Setting the Stage

Domestic violence is a serious and widespread issue affecting women and families in Utah. One in three Utah women will experience some form of domestic violence in her lifetime, and our rate is slightly higher than the national average (32.4% vs 28.8%).[1] According to the Utah Domestic Violence Coalition, more than 40% of adult homicides in Utah since 2000 have been domestic violence related.[2] Domestic violence is often presumed to refer only to physical violence, but it also includes many other forms of abuse—emotional, verbal, financial, spiritual, digital/online, and sexual. Domestic violence can be perpetrated against anyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. A recent survey shows that 86% of Utah women believe domestic violence is a problem in their communities, and 63% believe violence against women is in-creasing.[3] It affects not only women but their families, friends, children, and communities.

> *One in three Utah women will experience some form of domestic violence in her lifetime, and 40% of adult homicides in Utah are domestic violence related.*

This research snapshot focuses on three key areas:

1) An overview of domestic violence statistics in Utah,
2) The impact of domestic violence on Utah children and teens, and
3) A discussion of the costs of domestic violence in Utah.

Domestic Violence in Utah

First, it is important to note that the terms "domestic violence" and "intimate partner violence" are often used interchangeably to describe abusive behavior by one individual against his or her partner in a relationship, but technically intimate partner violence is a subset of domestic violence. For the purposes of this snapshot, the term "domestic violence" will generally be used.

Domestic violence is a threat to the safety and well-being of Utah women. According to a 2008 report from the Utah Department of Health (the most recent report with these specific data), women in Utah experienced 169,156 intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes each year (these data were collected by the Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in 2008).[4] Of women who experience domestic violence, 66% said the perpetrator was a current or former husband or male live-in partner, and 26% said the abuser was a former boyfriend.[5] Approximately 21% of Utah women who have been victims of domestic violence report having been in multiple abusive relationships.[6]

While the number of domestic violence cases filed in Utah courts has been on the decline in recent years (3,513 cases filed in 2013 compared to 5,976 cases filed in 2001),[7] domestic violence remains a serious issue. Experts acknowledge this is an under-reported crime,[8] and thus it is impossible to know exactly how widespread the problem is. Still, domestic violence accounts for approximately 19 deaths per year in Utah,[9] and approximately 12% of suicides are domestic violence related.[10] Utah women are 10 times more likely to die from domestic violence related homicide than men, though more Utah men than women commit suicide because of domestic violence.[11] One-third of domestic violence perpetrators commit suicide after committing homicide.[12]

While domestic violence can happen to anyone, a number of factors can have an impact on the risk of domestic violence in a woman's life, including relationship status, education level, income, and age. The following statistics related to these factors are from the most recent Utah Behavioral Risk Surveillance System report conducted by the Utah Department of Health and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:[13]

Marital Status: Divorced and separated women in Utah report a higher rate of domestic violence (42.1%) than married women (11.2%) or unmarried women (12.7%).

Education: Domestic violence has an inverse relation-ship with a woman's education level. Nearly 23% of women with less than a high school education report experiencing domestic violence, compared to 10.3% of women with a college degree.

Income: Women whose annual income is less than $20,000 report higher rates of domestic violence (23%)

Authors: Dr. Susan R. Madsen (Orin R. Woodbury Professor of Leadership & Ethics, Utah Valley University), Tiffany Turley (Title IX Coordinator, Brigham Young University), and Robbyn T. Scribner (Research Fellow, Utah Women & Leadership Project).
For questions or information: uwlp@usu.edu or www.utwomen.org

than women with an annual income of $50,000 or more (12.7%).

Age: The older a Utah woman is, the more likely she is to report having ever experienced domestic violence, with the exception of women aged 65+. Around 10% of Utah women aged 18–24 report experiencing abuse, compared to 12.4% of women aged 25–34, 14.9% of women aged 35–44, 19.2% of women aged 45–54, and 22.2% of women aged 55–64. It is important to note that these statistics were gathered from women who were in a safe place to respond to the CDC survey, which may account for the difference between the overall average of one in three women experiencing domestic violence in her lifetime.

Effects on Children and Teens

Domestic violence affects not only the victims, but also their friends, neighbors, and families—particularly their children. Every year, around 80 Utah children are present at the scene of either the murder or attempted murder of their mothers. [14] Domestic violence committed in the presence of a child is considered to be child abuse in Utah, [15] as it has significant long-term negative effects (e.g., physical, emotional, and behavioral) on the child. In fact, a 2006 Utah study found that adult victims of domestic violence are considerably more likely than non-victims to have witnessed domestic violence as a child (34%) or to have been abused by their parents (36%). [16]

According to the Utah Department of Health, women and children who enter domestic violence shelters spend an average of 29.9 days in a shelter. Overall, approximately 3,000 men, women, and children stay in Utah's domestic violence shelters each year, and Utah's Division of Child and Family Services receives more than 4,600 domestic violence related child abuse referrals annually. [17]

Dating violence is a form of domestic violence that often affects teenagers. Like domestic violence, dating violence includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; it can also have negative long-term consequences. Since 1999, the rate of Utah youth who report having experienced dating violence in the past 12 months is slightly higher than the national average, while the overall percentage of Utah youth who have reported dating violence is lower than the national average (7.0% compared to 10.3%). [18] In addition, according to Utah's most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 11.8% of high school students in Utah have experienced some form of dating violence. [19]

The Costs of Domestic Violence

While there are no specific data related to the costs of domestic violence in Utah, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control analyzed data from 1995 and reported that the estimated national costs were $5.8 billion each year, which included only the cost of direct medical and mental health services and some measure of lost productivity. This report excluded other major financial costs, such as social services, criminal justice, and some types of medical services. [20] Another study updated these figures to 2003 dollars and concluded the annual costs exceeded 8.3 billion. [21] A 2011 study examined federal, state, local, and charitable expenditures related to domestic violence, considering law enforcement and legal expenditures as well as funds to support shelters and other support programs for those who have experienced domestic violence. This report estimated these specific costs to be 4 billion annually in the United States. [22] While current, comprehensive figures detailing all the various financial expenditures related to domestic violence are difficult to estimate, it is clear that the financial toll on both women and society is great.

According to a 2008 report from the Utah Department of Health, [23] domestic abuse can greatly affect quality of life. For example, Utah women who have been victims of domestic violence report a significantly higher rate of dissatisfaction with life in general (9.6%) than women who have not been abused (2.3%). Further, they report not having the social and emotional support they need (30.2% vs. 11.2%), having poorer health (50.8% vs. 36%), finding themselves limited in activities because of physical and emotional struggles (40% vs. 20.7%), and requiring the use of special equipment such as a wheelchair because of their health problems (13.1% vs. 4.4%). [24] The same Utah Department of Health report also shows that victims of domestic violence report a higher prevalence of missing work and activities (11.9%) compared to women who have not experienced abuse (2.9%), having seven or more poor mental health days during the past month (38.8% vs. 13.2%), and receiving treatment for mental illness and emotional struggles (29.8% vs. 13.7%). [25]

Conclusion

Preventing and otherwise reducing domestic violence rates will improve the health and well-being of women in Utah and strengthen the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole. The following list provides additional information or resources:

- Center for Women and Children in Crisis
- Salt Lake Area Family Justice Center
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Utah Association for Domestic Violence Treatment
- Utah Department of Health Violence & Injury Prevention Program
- Utah Domestic Violence Coalition
- United Way Utah 2-1-1
- YWCA Utah

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