

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ETHNICITY

Statistics

- The average annual nonfatal intimate partner victimization rate (for females) from 2001-2005 is 11.1% for American Indians, 5% for African Americans, 4% for Anglos and 4.3% for Hispanics. *U.S. Dept. of Justice, BOJ Statistics, Intimate Partner Violence in the United States, Dec. 2007*
- 70.2% African American women, 58.2% of white females and 66.3% of Hispanic females reported their violent victimization to the police. *Ibid.*
- 77% of Hispanic Texans indicated that they know a relative, friend or a co-worker that has experienced some form of physical, sexual or verbal domestic abuse. *Saurage Research Inc. of Houston, random survey of 1,200 Texans in August 2002, released in February 2003.*
- 39% of Vietnamese surveyed know a woman who has been physically abused by her partner.
<http://www.atask.org/>

Overview of the Issue

- Domestic violence does not occur more often in some communities than others. It can happen within any race, culture, nationality or religion. Different views on gender roles, equality and marriage do not excuse abuse.
- What the statistics reveal are not necessarily different rates of victimization, but different reporting rates. This indicates that demographic, environmental and social factors intersect with ethnicity to determine levels of risk, access to resources and justice sought and/or received.
- Victims of minority ethnic backgrounds often face communication barriers not only with language, but also with different perspectives on justice and what treatment methods they should use. This may cause alienation from the formal systems meant to help them and lead to chronic underreporting and under-utilization of victim resources. Victims want to be understood and treated within the context of their own lives and given practical options.
- Some communities actively discourage reporting or seeking justice outside of the community. They may be suspicious of perceived external 'prying', afraid of being trivialized or stereotyped or of tarnishing the reputation of the race, cultural, religion or nationality. These attitudes can isolate victims from resources that may help them, especially if their community blames them for breaking up a marriage and family.

What You Can Do

- Advocates, counselors and law enforcement should train to become culturally competent. All victims should be treated with respect, sincerity and compassion. All victims should be treated as individuals first, even as their beliefs, culture and degree of acculturation is respected.
- Listen without judgement. A willingness to understand their cultural background and values and to recognize their experiences of institutional racism and discrimination can help minority victims feel less isolated, more supported and more comfortable disclosing domestic violence.
- Survivors need to assess how their community either offers support or alienates them from useful resources. Service providers who build relationships with community advocates can help survivors with this assessment.

Impact on Victims

- Women who come from cultures that rationalize domestic violence or have less access to legal and social services may suffer higher rates of battering.
- Ethnic victims from close-knit or insular communities often contend with issues of confidentiality, victim-blaming and negative stigmatization in addition to their abuse. They may risk losing their children, their friends, access to their faith and way of life simply by speaking out.

Quotable

While domestic violence honors no boundaries of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, gender, or sexual preference, various cultural beliefs and ideologies may hinder a survivor's ability to seek help outside their community.