

**MAKING THE CONNECTION:  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AND  
PUBLIC HEALTH**



**Local Resources**

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:  
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**

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**Recognition &  
Prevention of  
Domestic Violence:  
A Guide for Health  
Care Professionals**

- Violence Against Women**
- *is a women's health issue*
  - *is a public health issue*
  - *is a crime*

**Virginia Commonwealth University  
Institute for Women's Health  
National Center of Excellence**

**Virginia Department of Health  
Center for Injury & Violence Prevention**

**Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence  
Action Alliance**

Domestic Violence is associated  
with 8 out of 10 of the leading indicators  
for **Healthy People 2010:**  
Tobacco Use,  
Substance Abuse, Injury and Violence,  
Mental Health,  
Responsible Sexual Behavior,  
Health Care Access, Immunization, and Obesity

**Domestic and sexual violence** is a health care problem of epidemic proportions. In addition to the immediate trauma caused by abuse, domestic violence contributes to a number of chronic health problems, including depression, alcohol and substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and often limits the ability of women to manage other chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) violence is a significant risk factor of morbidity and mortality in women. The effects on health, health behavior, and health prospects are profound.

**The Link to Public Health – Get the Facts:**

- Survivors of violence, compared with other women, more often rate their health care as poor or compromised.
- Domestic violence is more prevalent among women than diabetes, breast cancer, and cervical cancer and happens to women of all ages, races, and religions.
- Homicide is one of the leading causes of pregnancy associated injury deaths.
- A 2004 study found that women who experienced sexual violence were more likely than other women to have visited a health provider 8 or more times during the past year.
- The Centers for Disease Control found that the total direct health care costs of domestic violence were estimated at \$4.1 billion each year. Emerging research indicates that hospital-based interventions will reduce health care costs by at least 20 percent.
- Recent clinical studies have supported the effectiveness of a two-minute screening for early detection of abuse of pregnant women.
- In four different studies of survivors of abuse, up to 81% of the patients reported that they would like their healthcare providers to ask them privately about domestic violence.

A number of health professional organizations including the American Medical Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Psychological Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, Association of Women's Health Obstetric & Neonatal Nurses and others have developed policy statements, position papers, and guidelines on this important health issue.

## Definitions

**Domestic violence and abuse**, also called intimate partner violence, is a pattern of abusive behaviors, used by one individual with the intention of exerting power and control over another individual in the context of an intimate relationship and can include:

- \* physical abuse
- \* psychological or emotional abuse
- \* sexual assault
- \* isolation
- \* controlling the partner's money, shelter, time, food, etc

For persons with disabilities, abuse can also take the form of neglect, such as denying appropriate personal or medical care.

Often, in opposite sex relationships the violent person is a husband, former husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend, but sometimes the abuser is female and the victim is male. Domestic and sexual violence can also be a very serious issue for individuals who are transgender, lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual. Societal stigma can amplify these individuals' victimization, placing them in even greater danger and making it more difficult to locate and access appropriate services.

**Sexual violence** is conduct of a sexual nature which is non-consensual, and is accomplished through threat, coercion, exploitation, deceit, force, physical, or mental incapacitation, and/or power of authority.

**Sexual assault and abuse** is any type of sexual activity that a person does not agree to, including:

- \* inappropriate touching
- \* vaginal, anal, or oral penetration
- \* sexual intercourse without consent
- \* rape / attempted rape
- \* voyeurism
- \* sexual harassment

It can happen in different situations: by a stranger or someone the victim knows; in an isolated place, on a date, or in the home.

## Health Consequences of Domestic and Sexual Violence

### Physical Health Effects:

Somatic and psychosomatic complaints  
Physical injury  
Chronic pain  
Fibromyalgia  
Chronic irritable bowel syndrome  
Musculoskeletal complaints  
Eating disorders  
Hypertension  
Smoking  
Traumatic Brain Injury  
Head, Neck or Dental Injury

### Health Effects of Forced Sex:

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's)  
HIV/AIDS  
Pelvic pain, pelvic inflammatory disease  
Urinary tract infections  
Unintended pregnancy  
Anal & vaginal tearing  
Risk of homicide

### Mental Health Effects:

Depression  
Anxiety  
Sleep disorders  
Poor self esteem  
Suicidality  
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder  
Alcohol abuse/ Drug abuse  
Eating Disorders

Research links a history of victimization to significant long term chronic health problems and health risk behaviors. Failure to identify and intervene compromises the quality of care provided.

## Make a Difference - Ask the Question

Screen All Patients for Domestic Violence

**RADAR: Action Steps for Health Care Providers**

Routinely inquire about current/past violence  
**Ask Direct Questions**  
**Document Findings**  
**Assess safety**  
**Review options and referrals**

Talk to the patient alone in a safe, private environment. Ask simple direct questions such as:

- Because violence is so common in many peoples lives, I've begun to ask all my patients about it routinely
- Are you in a relationship with a person who physically hurts or threatens you?
- Did someone cause these injuries? Who?

**Be supportive**

- You are not alone
- It is not your fault
- You don't deserve to be hurt or hit

**Assess safety**

- Are you afraid to go home?
- Are there threats of suicide, homicide or are there weapons present?

**Always**

- Offer follow-up support
- Provide referrals

The best way to find out about domestic or sexual violence is to ask directly.

For more information and resources, visit  
[www.ProjectRadarVA.com](http://www.ProjectRadarVA.com)

## Resources

**Virginia**  
**Family Violence & Sexual Assault**  
**Hotline 1-800-838-8238**

**Family Violence Prevention Fund**  
[www.endabuse.org/health](http://www.endabuse.org/health)

Improving the health care response to domestic violence through public policy reform and health education and prevention efforts, training and education materials and resources.

**Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance**  
[www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org)

Serving as a leader in Virginia's response to sexual and domestic violence, education, advocacy, training, and resources. Statewide hotline.

**Virginia Department of Health – Center for Violence & Injury Prevention**  
[www.vahealth.org/civp](http://www.vahealth.org/civp)

Raising awareness and enhancing skills to prevent injury and violence in Virginia communities.

**VDH Medical Outreach Project**  
[www.projectradarva.com](http://www.projectradarva.com)

Links to information, resources, training, and tools for health professionals

**Virginia Commonwealth University Institute for Women's Health, Center of Excellence**  
[www.womenshealth.vcu.edu](http://www.womenshealth.vcu.edu)

Working to improve the health of women across the lifespan through health education, research, clinical care, outreach and leadership development..

**MAKE THE CONNECTION**