



The Critical Role of VAWA: Services to Victims and their Families

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is the cornerstone of our nation's response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. VAWA grant programs, administered by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) at the U.S. Department of Justice, provide funding, guidance and tools to law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, victim service providers, and communities to provide comprehensive support to victims, hold offenders accountable, and keep communities safe.

Since originally enacted in 1994, each VAWA reauthorization has been used to address the realities and needs reported by victims themselves and those who work directly with them every day. The reauthorization process provides an invaluable opportunity to gather critical feedback from those administering programs on the ground – law enforcement, court personnel, advocates, and community partners – to ensure that VAWA continues to promote fully accessible and effective services for all victims who find the courage to seek help and efforts to prevent the recurrence of victimization.

Domestic and sexual violence is widespread in the U. S., with immediate and significant impacts and life-long health consequences for victims and their families.

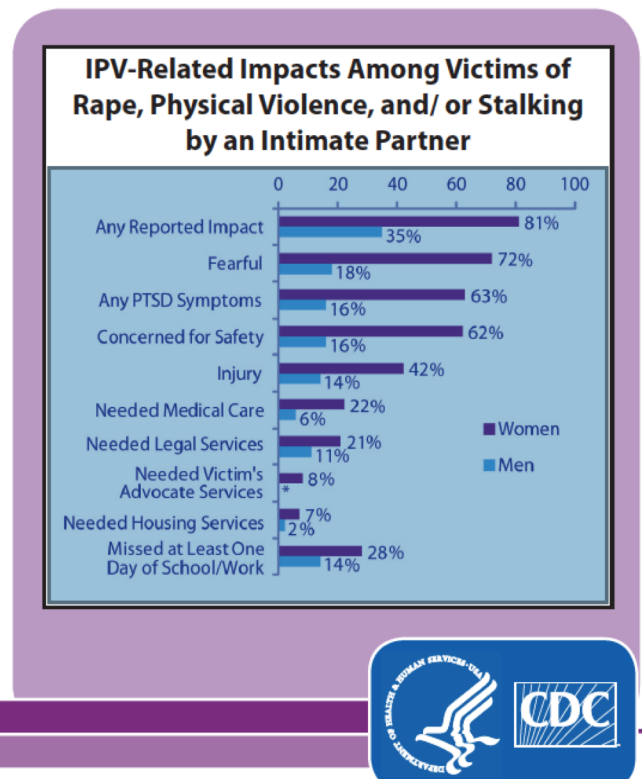
While women are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence (also referred to intimate partner violence or IPV) and sexual violence, VAWA-funded programs are also responsive to men abused in opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and men who are victims of sexual assault. VAWA's non-discrimination requirements¹ support programs' ongoing ability to serve *all* victims who seek safety and services.

Both women and men experience domestic and sexual violence at alarming rates.²

- Nearly **1 in 5** women (19.3%) and **1 in 59** men (1.7%) have been raped in their lifetime.
- Approximately **1.9 million** women were raped during 2009.
- 1 in 4** women (22.3%) have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while **1 in 7** men (14.0%) have experienced the same.
- 1 in 6** women (15.2%) have been stalked during their lifetime, **1 in 19** men (5.7%).
- Among men who identify as gay, **26%** report experiencing intimate partner violence, and **40%** report experiencing sexual violence.³

Disproportionate impact

- Women are more likely than men to experience severe physical violence, sexual violence other than rape by an intimate partner, stalking by an intimate partner, and expressive aggression.⁴
- Women are more than **4 x** more likely than men to be beaten, **6 x** more likely to be slammed against something, and **9 x** more likely to be hurt by choking or suffocating.⁵



Enhanced services to underserved populations. Victims' experiences and a growing body of research confirm that certain populations are victimized by violence and abuse – and report it – at different rates and may have less favorable experiences with the criminal justice system when they report. The ways that victims experience, resist, and survive violence can be shaped by a range of cultural, social, and economic factors.

VAWA funds authorized by Congress are used to address unique challenges that people from underserved and marginalized populations face when they are victimized. Grantees conduct culturally and linguistically specific outreach to these populations and develop policies, practices, and resources that ensure these victims can access the services and protections they need.

VAWA provides critical support for services to victims, an essential component of a community's response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Decades of experience and evidence-based research highlights VAWA's effectiveness. Victims of domestic and sexual violence face multiple physical, emotional, and financial barriers when seeking to become and remain safe from violence.⁶ Research has demonstrated that providing direct services and support that recognize the impact of trauma on victims can improve outcomes.⁷

Victim service providers use VAWA funds to support victims and their families as they cope with the immediate and long-term physical, emotional, and economic impacts of their victimization. Nearly **1,900** domestic violence programs, and **1,300** rape crisis centers provide core services such as crisis intervention and advocacy, and a broader network of organizations provide specialized education, preventive, and culturally specific services.

As noted in OVW's 2016 Biennial Report to Congress,⁸ "VAWA-funded grantees provided more than **1 million** services to victims in the 2 years covered by the report. On average, VAWA grantees provided services to **124,916** individuals – men, women and children – during each 6-month reporting period, including an average of **111,817** primary victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or child or elder abuse; as well as victims' children. The services that VAWA-funded grantees provided to victims and family members most often were:



The 2018 VAWA reauthorization must maintain the protections within current law while making targeted enhancements to increase the accessibility and responsiveness of victim services.

¹ 34 U.S.C. 12291(b)(13).

² Breiding MJ, Smith SG, Basile KC, Walters ML, Chen J, Merrick MT. Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization—National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, U.S., 2011. *MMWR* 2014; 63(SS-8): 1-18. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm?s_cid=ss6308a1_e

³ Walters, M.L., Chen, J., and Breiding, M.N. (January 2013). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_sofindings.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid* at 2.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ Overstreet, N. M., & Quinn, D. M. (2013). The Intimate Partner Violence Stigmatization Model and barriers to help-seeking. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 35(1), 109–122. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2012.746599>.

⁷ Goodman, L. A., Thomas, K., Cattaneo, L. B., Heimel, D., Woulfe, J., & Chong, S. K. (2016). Survivor-defined practice in domestic violence work: Measure development and preliminary evidence of link to empowerment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31(1), 163–185. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514555131>.

⁸ 2016 Biennial Report: The 2016 Biennial Report to Congress on the Effectiveness of Grant Programs Under VAWA. (2016). U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/vawameil/attachments/congressreports/2016RTC_MASTER_12.19.16.pdf.