

## ***Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Domestic Abuse***

The numbers are alarming and shocking...

On average, nearly 20 million people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner

- On a typical day, there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide
- One in four females will experience domestic violence in their lifetime
- 19.3 million women and 5.1 million men in the United States have been stalked in their lifetime
- Married immigrant women experience higher levels of physical and sexual abuse than unmarried immigrant women, 59.5 percent to 49.8 percent, respectively
- Economically, between 21% and 60% of victims lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse; the cost of domestic violence exceeds \$8.3 billion per year.

Domestic violence – also called intimate partner violence – is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Further, it is said that domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, religion, or gender, and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse.

Sometimes domestic violence begins or increases during pregnancy, putting a baby's health at risk. And the danger continues after a child is born.

Unfortunately, studies show that 3 to 4 million children between the ages of 3 and 17 are at risk of exposure to domestic violence each year. U.S. government statistics show that 95% of domestic violence cases involve women victims of male partners. The children of these women often witness the violence.

Witnessing can mean seeing actual incidents of physical/and or sexual abuse. It can mean hearing threats or fighting noises from another room. Children may also observe the aftermath of physical abuse such as blood, bruises, tears, torn clothing, and broken items.

Immigrant women are at high risk for domestic violence, but due to their immigration status, they may face a more difficult time escaping abuse. Immigrant women often feel trapped in abusive relationships because of immigration laws, language barriers, social isolation, and lack of financial resources. Abusers often use their partners' immigration status as a tool of control. In such situations, it is common for a batterer to exert control over his partner's immigration status to force her to remain in the relationship.

There are domestic violence shelters throughout southern New Mexico that can help provide resources needed to escape the abuser, receive counseling services, and become more financially independent. It is also important to know that there are immigration options for those who are victims of domestic violence. These legal options called VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) and U visa, may provide a work permit and a path to residency. VAWA is for the abused spouses of U.S. Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents. It is a confidential process without repercussions for the spouse with legal status, and a police report is *not* required. The U visa is an option for those who have been abused by their undocumented spouse and have made a police report. U-visas are also available to those who have been victims of other serious crimes (such as sexual assault) and have reported them. These immigration options exist so that people will not have to live in fear.

The only way to stop the cycle of violence is to take action — and the sooner the better. Start by telling someone about the abuse, whether it's a friend, loved one, health care provider, or one of Catholic Charities' attorneys or caseworkers. At first, you might find it hard to talk about the abuse. But you'll also likely feel relief and receive much-needed support and assistance.