

“It is hard to STOP because it is hard to REPORT.”

Domestic Violence in Houston

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Domestic violence is neither a new nor a localized problem. The myriad forms of domestic violence can be found all over the world, and evidence of its occurrence is as far back as written history goes. Through the various historical periods and different societies, the world over, this long history of apathy toward the subject has created a huge mass of social, legal, cultural, and traditional beliefs and attitudes that modern civilization have yet to overcome despite their best efforts and technology.

Houston area struggles with domestic violence spike (Houston Chronicle, November 2015). Calls to the domestic violence crisis hotline jumped up to 20%. In Harris County, the combined violence cases filed in 2013 and 2014 surpassed 20,000. But those numbers don't tell the whole story because many domestic violence cases go underreported.

What is Domestic Violence?

It is inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another; also: a repeated or habitual pattern of such behavior.

Types of Domestic Violence

Criminal

- **Physical** - uninvited physical contact, striking, kicking, use of knife or gun
- **Sexual** – marital rape, sexual coercion, human trafficking
- **Psychological** – intimidation, verbal abuse, computer hacking

Non-Criminal

- **Deny access** to friends and social contact
- **Isolation**
- **Restricting** use of telephone
- **Deny access** to family finances

Domestic Violence Risk Factors

- Female gender, child or elderly
- Dependence (physical, financial and emotional)
- Low education
- History of witnessing violence in the home or maltreatment as a child
- Alcohol and substance abuse by the perpetrator or victim
- Isolation on the part of the perpetrator or victim
- Families with poor social support
- Single-parent families
- Unplanned or unwanted pregnancies
- Low socioeconomic status
- Victims of abuse
- Mental Retardation/Children with anomalies

How to detect domestic violence

- Signs of neglect, poor hygiene, nutritional deficits, lack of dental or medical attention

- Chemical dependency
- Mental illness/mental retardation
- Fear, unwillingness to disclose the causes of injuries
- Injuries to abdomen, breast, genitalia or torso
- Burns to back, buttocks, genitals, soles or palms
- The gap between the time of injury and presentation for treatment
- History of multiple pregnancies, spontaneous abortions
- Unexplained hearing loss
- Children with aggressive behavior, enuresis, excessive masturbation, poor school performance

Eliminating Domestic Violence in our community

Prevention

Routine interview of individual histories which includes questions concerning violence in the home (Interview patients alone)

- Has anyone at home ever threatened or hurt you?
- Have your children ever been abused
- Has anyone ever forced you to have sex
- Are you afraid of anyone at home
- Do you feel safe at home
- Have you ever been denied access to medical care
- Have you ever been coerced to sign papers you didn't understand
- What is the type of punishment used at home

Management

- Direct victims toward resources to assist in developing survival skills
- Do not recommend joint counseling; abuser may punish the victim for exposure
- Maintain a supportive, nonjudgmental attitude
- Assist in the development of a safety plan, including the availability of clothes, keys, documents, and cash
- Reporting of abuse is mandatory if the victim is a child or elderly
- Review HIPAA regulations regarding reporting
- Some states mandate reporting of suspected domestic violence
- Recommend emergency shelter if there seems to be a life-threatening situation
- Assure patient safety before releasing from care
- Meticulous documentation is crucial in case of future legal action

Consultation and referral

National:

1. National Resource Center on Domestic violence (<http://www.nrcdv.org>)
2. National Domestic Violence Hotline – **1.800.799-7233 (SAFE)**
3. Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN) **1.800.656.4674 (HOPE)**

Local/Houston:

1. Houston Police Department Family Violence Unit- 1200 Travis, 11th floor **713.308.1100**
2. Houston Area Women's Center – 1010 Waugh Drive **713-528.6798**
3. Harris County District Attorney's Office (Family Criminal Law Division) 1310 Prairie Street, **713.274.0212**