Setting the Stage

Domestic violence (DV) is a serious and widespread issue affecting women and families in Utah. One in three Utah women will experience some form of contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in her lifetime (33.6%), which is close to the national average (37.3%). Additionally, 41.6% of Utah women will experience psychological aggression, 35.5% will experience expressive aggression, and 36.4% will experience coercive control in their lifetime (compared to 47.1%, 39.3%, and 39.7% in the US, respectively). Between 2009 and 2016, 22.7% of adult homicides in Utah were related to DV or intimate partner incidents. Despite its prevalence, many DV service providers (42.5%) who participated in a 2022 statewide needs assessment think the community believes that DV rarely occurs. In stark contrast, a 2006 study showed that 86.0% of the Utah women surveyed believed DV is a problem in their communities, and 63.0% believed violence against women was increasing. Ultimately, it is critical to raise awareness and help Utah communities understand the impact of DV.

As a term, DV encompasses intimate partner violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse from roommates or other people in the home. DV and intimate partner violence (IPV) are often used interchangeably; however, IPV is abuse committed by a current or former romantic partner, such as a dating or sexual partner, or by a partner in a committed relationship, such as marriage. DV is often presumed to refer only to physical violence; however, it includes many other forms of violence. It is defined as the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, financial and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.

In Utah, 33.6% of women will experience contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking in her lifetime, and 41.6% will experience psychological aggression.

DV can be perpetrated against anyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. A recent survey shows it affects not only women but their families, friends, children, and communities. Although survivors of DV can be from any background, this snapshot will primarily focus on the experiences of women, and it updates a 2017 report. In addition, this snapshot will address as many forms of DV as possible, except sexual violence, which is addressed in Sexual Assault Among Utah Women: A 2022 Update. Some data surrounding Utah women’s experiences with DV is outdated or is not analyzed by gender. When the data available are older with no update, we placed the + symbol next to the corresponding endnote superscript. When the data available are not analyzed by gender, we placed the * symbol next to the corresponding endnote superscript. The research snapshot is organized into the following categories:

1) DV in Utah;
2) DV impact on marginalized communities;
3) DV injuries and fatalities;
4) Effects of DV on children and teens;
5) Costs of DV;
6) Services and advocacy; and
7) What Utahns can do.

Domestic Violence in Utah

DV is a threat to the safety and well-being of Utah women. An estimated minimum of 552,117 Utah women have or will experience DV in their lifetime. This is based on a 2021 population estimate of 1,643,205 women in Utah, and the figure reported earlier—that 33.6% of Utah women will experience some form of contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking. A 2008 report estimated that Utah women experience 169,156 physical assaults or rapes each year. In a 2009 Utah report, 61.0% of female DV victims said the perpetrator was a current or former husband or male live-in partner, and 26.7% said the abuser was a former boyfriend. Of note, an earlier study found that 21.0% of Utah women who had been DV victims reported being in...
multiple abusive relationships. More recent data about female and male victims—collected from 2017 to 2021 by local law enforcement agencies that participate in the National Incident Reporting System (NIBRS)—found that, on average, 30.2% of reported DV was enacted by a boyfriend or girlfriend, 19.8% by a spouse (legal or common law) or ex-spouse, and 17.9% by a parent.

DV cases filed in Utah courts declined in the recent past (3,513 cases filed in 2013 compared to 5,976 cases filed in 2001). Compared to court cases, the total number of incidents reported to the NIBRS increased from 2017 to 2021, with a total increase of 15.7%—an average increase of 3.8% per year. The largest year-over-year growth occurred in 2020 at 8.8%. During this four-year period, Utah’s total population grew 7.6%, with an average increase of 1.9% per year. Thus, Utah’s DV increases outpace population growth.

Rates of DV vary throughout the year. From 2017 to 2021, months with higher average rates of reported DV were May (1,225 average incidents; 8.8% average of yearly incidents), June (1,227; 8.8%), July (1,267; 9.1%), and August (1,265; 9.1%). The remaining months ranged from an average of 1,014 incidents (7.3% of yearly incidents) in February to 1,162 incidents (8.3%) in September.

According to an analysis of NIBRS reported DV incidents by county and county population figures from 2021, Daggett has the highest incidence of DV in Utah, with 10.4 out of 1,000 people receiving police intervention compared to the rate of 4.5 per 1,000 people statewide. Tooele ranks second (8.1 out of 1,000), followed by Uintah (8.0), Weber (7.9), and Duchesne (7.0). Counties with the lowest rates of DV receiving police intervention include Sanpete (1.8), Morgan, Garfield, and Rich (all 0.8), and San Juan (0.1). The number of counties reporting data to NIBRS increased from 17 in 2017 to 26 in 2021 (of 29).

DV rates rose nationally during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Utah reflected this trend. Of the 20 Utah counties with DV data for 2019 and 2020, 13 had increased rates, some of which were dramatic. For example, rates of DV increased in Iron by 516.7%, followed by Box Elder (272.8%), Sanpete (200.0%), Tooele (180.6%), and Uintah (96.3%). Of the 22 Utah counties with data for both 2020 and 2021, 16 had increased rates of DV receiving police intervention. The five highest changes were Daggett (400.0%), Juab (293.8%), Tooele (227.7%), Wasatch (203.2%), and Grand (111.1%). Only eight counties saw rates climb across both years of the pandemic: Cache, Iron, Kane, Millard, Sevier, Tooele, Utah, and Washington.

Experts acknowledge DV is an underreported crime, and thus it is difficult to know exactly how widespread the problem is. There is currently no legal requirement to report DV in the NIBRS. Additionally, Utah’s law enforcement agencies do not always code incidents of DV as such (e.g., some incidents are coded as family problems or disorderly conduct), leaving researchers to infer DV based on the type of violence, location of violence, and relationship of the victim to the offender. This often requires reviewing and hand counting individual case files, which inhibits comprehensive, updated research on DV in Utah. Another challenge is that NIBRS data is not disaggregated by gender. Factors related to the victim also affect underreporting, such as fear and lack of resources. And finally, some research suggests that while faith communities condemn DV, DV is likely to be underreported among religious groups because it is not always openly acknowledged, and lay leaders are not consistently trained to address concerns in trauma-informed ways. Overall, Utah’s rates of DV are likely much higher than the numbers reported here for many reasons, including those outlined here.

**Domestic Violence in Marginalized Groups**

Rates of DV are higher across marginalized communities. National and global statistics suggest that White women experience sexual violence and DV at a lifetime rate of 34.0%. In comparison, only Asian women experience sexual violence and DV at lower rates (25.0%); Hispanic/Latinx women experience DV at equivalent rates (34.0%); Black women and individuals who are two or more races experience DV at higher rates (40.0% and 50.0%, respectively); and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women and Native American women experience DV at dramatically higher rates (68.0% and 84.0%, respectively). It is noteworthy that 80.0% of abusers of Native women are non-Native people. Dr. Annie Isabel Fukushima, a scholar of gender-based violence, underscores that higher rates of sexual violence and DV do “not make communities of color more violent, but rather, highlights the ongoing impacts of structural violence and decades-old discriminatory policies, like redlining, on communities of color that also exacerbate conditions of abuse.” In addition to experiencing disproportionate rates of DV, communities of color also face challenges in accessing community-based and system-based resources. Many women of color report being “resistant” to utilize support services because they see them as being unprepared to serve diverse communities.

In general, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer + (LGBTIQ+) community members also experience violence at higher rates than other communities. Nationally, LGBTIQ+ individuals are almost four times more likely to experience violence in all settings, six times more likely to be victims of violence within a close relationship, with LBTT women being five times more likely to experience violence than other women. The types of IPV most frequently experienced by LGBTIQ+ folks are physical (20.0%), verbal (18.0%), and threats/intimidation (13.0%), with lesbians experiencing isolation by their abuser twice as much as other LGBTIQ+ communities. Estimates suggest only half of violent victimizations of LGBTIQ+
individuals are reported to the police, primarily because of fear of discrimination or of being “outed.”

Individuals with a disability experience DV at a rate 40.0% higher than non-disabled individuals. As of 2020, over 22.3% of Utah’s population lives with a disability, with women reporting disabilities at higher rates than men.

**Domestic Violence Injuries & Fatalities**

NIBRS tracks the following injuries: none, apparent broken bones, apparent minor injury, loss of teeth, severe laceration, possible internal injury, unconsciousness, and other major injury. Utah’s 2017 to 2021 data indicates 31.7% of the injury data points were coded as none (i.e., DV occurred with no physical indication of injury). Within each injury type, sibling victims were most likely to receive apparent minor injuries (22.6%), boyfriends/girlfriends and other family members were most likely to lose teeth (26.1%), and boyfriends/girlfriends were most likely to receive injuries involving broken bones (29.3%), severe laceration (26.2%), possible internal injury (19.4%), unconsciousness (33.3%), and other major injury (28.8%).

Categories of weapons used against victims of DV are blunt objects (e.g., clubs), personal weapons (e.g., hands, teeth), asphyxiation (e.g., drowning, strangulation), various firearms (e.g., handgun), fire/incendiary devices (e.g., lighters), poison (e.g., narcotics, sleeping pills), knives/cutting objects (e.g., screwdriver, ax), motor vehicles (e.g., cars), none (i.e., no weapon), and other (i.e., weapon or force not fitting elsewhere).

In Utah, personal weapons were most likely to be used in incidents of DV receiving police intervention (67.7%), followed by none (15.4%), and other (7.3%). Explosives (<0.1%), poison (0.1%), and fire/incendiary devices (0.1%) were the least likely.

Over half of female homicides in the United States are committed by a current/former male intimate partner. In Utah, from 2009–2016, 22.7% of all homicides were related to IPV (84) or DV (54) incidents. About half of the IPV incidents were murder-suicide cases. In total, the incidents resulted in 208 deaths: 69 DV and 139 IPV victims (42 were suicides and 4 were undetermined deaths). Of the IPV victims, 85.9% were female.

Between 2009 and 2016, 10.7% of IPV homicide victims were aged 18–24, compared to 23.7% aged 25–34, 25.2% aged 35–44, 17.6% aged 45–54, and 22.9% aged 55–64. Related to education, 13.4% of IPV homicide victims had not graduated high school, compared to 42.9% who had completed high school or earned a GED, 27.7% who had some college credit, and 16.1% who had an associate’s degree or higher. In terms of location, the Utah Domestic Violence Coalition (UDVC) recently stated, “Homicides in rural communities are three times as likely to involve an intimate partner than in large cities.”

Many of these deaths could have been prevented. Over half of victims (53.9%) had a known IPV history reported to authorities. Homicide suspects had demonstrated increasing patterns of violence in advance of the incident: 23.0% had threatened use of weapons; 26.0% had shown an escalation in violence; and 34.0% had threatened harm. Other research suggests that victims who experience strangulation are 750.0% more likely to be victims of homicide.

**Effects on Children and Teens**

Children and teens are affected by DV within their household, as are neighbors and friends of the victim. DV committed in the presence of a child is considered to be child abuse in Utah, as it has long-term negative effects on the child (e.g., emotional, behavioral). According to 2020–2021 data, there were 1,929 reported Utah cases of violence in the presence of a child. Previous homicide data reported that 44 children were directly exposed to a homicide (i.e., saw/heard it, found body), 11 of whom were under the age of five.

In 2020, an estimated 0.6% to 1.9% of pregnant Utah women reported DV from their husbands, similar to the 1.4% of Utah women reporting in 2013 that their “husband or partner push[ed], hit, slap[ped], kick[ed], chok[ed], or physically hurt [them]” during pregnancy. Experts indicate these rates are likely much higher because women underreport DV. Women who have experienced DV during their pregnancies, and the children they carried, experience negative health outcomes after birth. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with postpartum depression (40.1% vs. 11.5% for non-victims), and their children experience a spectrum of behavioral and cognitive challenges.

Dating violence is a form of DV that often affects teenagers and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. It can have negative long-term consequences such as substance abuse, poor mental health, and antisocial behavior. Moreover, teens are more likely to experience DV as adults if they have previously experienced dating violence. Nationally, an estimated 8.0% to 10.8% of girls responding to the High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported being hurt on purpose by someone they were dating, and in Utah, an estimated 5.7% to 10.9% of girls reported dating violence.

The 2021 Utah Adolescent Health Report provides rates of dating violence in Utah's middle/high schools. Girls’ reported rates of dating violence decreased slightly between 2017 (12.5%) and 2019 (10.9%) but rose again in 2021 (12.4%). Utah girls were more likely to experience dating violence than Utah boys (the average rate was 3.1% higher). Geographically, Salt Lake County (13.9%) and Weber–Morgan (13.4%) had higher rates of teen dating violence than the rest of the state (11.0%); Utah County (8.3%) and southwest Utah (7.1%) had the lowest rates.
The Costs of Domestic Violence

Adult victims of DV report more long-term negative health and economic consequences than adults who have not been victimized. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, healthcare costs for those experiencing abuse are 42.0% higher than the costs for non-abused women. DV also imposes many costs on society, including medical and mental health services, criminal justice, and lost productivity. One analysis estimated the lifetime cost of DV was $103,767 per female victim and $23,414 per male victim, with a national economic burden of about $3.6 trillion across victims’ lives (this was in 2014 dollars, which equates to $4.5 trillion in 2022 dollars). Although current comprehensive figures detailing all costs related to DV are difficult to find, it is clear that the financial toll on society—and on women in particular—is vast.

Domestic abuse also greatly affects quality of life. For example, Utah women who have been victims of DV are significantly more likely to have seven or more poor mental health days (32.7% vs. 14.6%), miss more than seven days of work or activities (21.9% vs. 12.8%), have difficulty concentrating or remembering (19.7% vs. 10.9%), binge drink (19.7% vs. 10.9%), smoke every day (13.3% vs. 3.9%), have difficulty doing errands alone (10.0% vs. 3.4%), and have poor health (5.8% vs. 2.1%) compared to Utah women who have not been victimized.

Services and Advocacy

Each year, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) conducts a comprehensive survey that asks DV programs from around the country to report needs and services provided during the same 24-hour period. During the specified one-day period in 2021, 916 victims received services from 14 DV programs in Utah. If that same number of individuals received services each day, DV programs would serve 334,340 people each year, or 38.2 people each hour. From the survey, we know that through hotlines alone, DV programs receive 14.0 calls per hour. Although Utah ranks 16th out of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico regarding the total number of people served, 217 individuals went unserved on the day surveyed. If that same number of individuals went unserved each day, 79,205 requests for services would go unmet each year. That places Utah 49th out of 52 in terms of the percentage of unmet requests.

All Utah agencies surveyed by the NNEDV provide emergency shelter, with 79.0% providing additional shelter in a hotel/motel, 79.0% providing children’s support or advocacy, 71.0% providing housing/landlord support, 64.0% providing mental health support, 64.0% providing transportation, and only 57.0% providing bilingual support services. Utah ranks ninth out of 52 for the number of people served in emergency shelters, 22nd in providing transitional or other types of housing, and 21st in providing housing in hotels/motels. Despite all agencies providing emergency shelter and most providing additional housing in hotels/motels, approximately 44.0% of Utah’s unmet requests were for housing/shelter.

What Utahns Can Do

Access to resources and personal advocacy for friends and loved ones are key to preventing and decreasing DV. One of the most important actions each person can take is to know the signs of DV, believe friends and loved ones if they express concerns or fear about a relationship, and support them no matter what. We encourage all Utahns to explore available DV resources. For example, see UDVC’s list of service providers and information provided by the Utah Department of Health Violence & Injury Prevention Program, United Way Utah 2-1-1, Utah Association for Domestic Violence Treatment, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is necessary to increase support for those experiencing DV to stop generational cycles of abuse and their widespread impact.

Data collection is critical to understanding the impact of DV in Utah. We strongly recommend mandating data reporting and requiring law enforcement agencies to unify coding of DV incidents. We also recommend tracking demographic information, particularly regarding gender, as well as race and other important personal variables.

In addition, we offer the following recommendations, many of which are drawn from suggestions by the Utah Division of Child and Family Services about how to better support DV victims and strengthen DV services:

1. expand funding and support for victims, including emergency funds, transitional housing, and trauma-informed childcare services;
2. use one lethality assessment protocol and one data repository for consistency and standardization;
3. prohibit gun ownership for DV offenders who are a threat to themselves or others;
4. adjust existing language within the law to extend or make continuous protective orders for victims;
5. implement stronger consequences for DV offenders;
6. provide support for residential treatment alternatives for offenders to reduce housing disruption for victims and children;
7. clarify roles and responsibilities for local victim services and state agencies involved in victim services oversight and funding administration, and create a stakeholder committee that brings in an outside consultant to help create a unified strategic plan and make recommendations for resources;
8. continue statewide needs assessments; and
9. implement recommendations from the statewide needs assessment through legislation.
Conclusion

We acknowledge that every number in this report represents costs in human lives and, as such, anything other than reductions in rates of DV constitutes failure. Preventing and otherwise reducing DV rates will improve the health and well-being of women and families in Utah and strengthen the positive impact of women in their communities and the state.

1 Meaning rape (penetration of the victim), being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact.
36 George, S., et al. (2020, October).
37 Utah Bureau of Criminal Identification. (2022). Percentages within each injury type were calculated based on the sum of each injury type from 2017–2021.
47 Utah Domestic Violence Coalition. (2023, January 5). A statement regarding the homicides in Enoch, Utah. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KW052Fx9e9MoWCRRL8xgevnen9c66oCO/view
51 Public Health Indicator Based Information System. (2020). Query results for Utah’s pregnancy risk assessment and monitoring survey (PRAMS) query module—Physical abuse by husband or partner during
63 Calculations based on National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2022).
64 National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2022a).
67 Ranks determined by percentage of unmet requests for services based on total requests. The number of unmet requests was taken from National Network to End Domestic Violence (2022b)
68 National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2022a).
69 Ranks determined by percentage of people served with different housing types based on total number served. The number of people served was taken from National Network to End Domestic Violence (2022b).
70 National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2022a).

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