

The prevalence and current challenges of domestic violence against women in the United States

Introduction

Violence against women has been internationally recognized as a serious and pervasive phenomenon affecting women's lives and health, and a violation of their rights. Calls for its elimination have been led by women's health and rights organizations for decades. At the global level, these calls most notably date back to the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, as well as various other global and regional conventions and consensus documents (World Health Organization: 2021: VIII).

In between, domestic violence is an important type of violence against women. Domestic violence has been caused different public health and human rights crisis in the United States. This form of violence, which includes physical assault, psychological abuse, sexual coercion, financial control, and digital harassment, permeate all levels of society. The domestic violence is not limited to any specific gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status. Despite decades of advocacy, legal reforms, and increased public awareness, millions of women in the U.S. still avoid reporting and pursuing legal action against domestic violence against themselves for a variety of reasons, including fear of cultural and social stigma.

The consequences of domestic violence extend far beyond individual victims, affecting families, and society as a whole. Survivors of domestic violence often face long-term trauma, economic instability, and health problems, while perpetrators frequently evade accountability due to legal gaps, lack of proper implementation of existing laws, or victims' fear of having their secrets revealed. In the following, first, the legal frameworks for combating domestic violence against women in the legal system of the United States of America are briefly discussed. Then, the prevalence of domestic violence against women in this country is examined. Finally, the existing challenges toward combat domestic violence against women in the United States will be briefly discussed.

Legal frameworks addressing domestic violence in United States

Various laws have been enacted in the United States legal system to prevent and combat domestic violence, especially against women, at the federal and state levels, of which only the most important are mentioned here.

A. Federal legislation

At the federal level, there are many laws regarding domestic violence in the United States. Here, it will be mentioned just four of the most important ones.

1. The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) 1984

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) 1984, established the Crime Victims Fund which finances compensation programs for medical expenses, counseling, and lost wages through federal criminal fines rather than taxpayer dollars. The 2022 amendments of this Act improved access for marginalized survivors. It includes provisions specifically designed for domestic violence victims needing relocation assistance or specialized trauma care (U.S. Congress, 2024).

2. Lautenberg Amendment to Gun Control Act 1996

The Lautenberg Amendment to Gun Control Act 1996 is amendment to the Gun Control Act of 1968 created critical firearm restrictions for domestic abusers, prohibiting those subjects to restraining orders or convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors from possessing guns (U.S. Federal Legislative Information, 1996).

3. Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022

This Act provides funding for shelters, legal aid, and law enforcement training. It also expands protections for Native American tribes, allowing them to prosecute non-Native perpetrators (previously prohibited due to jurisdictional gaps) (U.S. Federal Legislative Information, 2022).

4. Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act (FVPSA) of 2023

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act (FVPSA) was originally enacted in 1984 (Pub. L. 98-457) and has been amended multiple times. The most recent reauthorization attempt (as of 2025) was proposed under H.R. 2119 (2023). This Act allocates federal grants to domestic violence shelters and crisis centers. Also, it supports culturally specific programs for minority communities (U.S. Federal Legislative Information, 2023).

B. State level laws

In addition to the numerous laws on sexual and domestic violence at the federal level in the United States of America, at the state level, each state in this country, depending on its circumstances, has enacted or is in the process of enacting more detailed and comprehensive laws on preventing and combating sexual and domestic violence, especially against women. Here, for the sake of greater familiarity, only three of these laws will be briefly mentioned as examples.

1. The California Domestic Violence Prevention Act- FAM 6200-6460

The California Domestic Violence Prevention Act is in California Family Code sections 6200 to 6460. It provides comprehensive protections for domestic violence survivors through two key provisions. First, it enables victims to obtain emergency protective orders that can include child custody arrangements and financial support requirements. Second, the law mandates immediate firearm surrender by restrained parties and prohibits new gun purchases during the order's duration (California Legislative Information, 2025).

2. New York Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act- S1077A/2019

This Act allows survivors to petition for reduced sentences if their abuse contributed to their crimes. It also grants judges authority to impose alternative sentences. Meanwhile, this Act permits already incarcerated survivors to apply for resentencing under the law (The New York State Senate, 2019).

3. Colorado - Domestic Abuse Accountability Act 2022

This Act combats domestic violence against women. It creates a public offender registry for convicted abusers, similar to sex offender lists, to enhance community safety. The law mandates standardized risk assessments in all cases to identify high-danger situations and prevent femicide. It funds supervised visitation centers to protect women and children during custody exchanges (Colorado General Assembly, 2022).

Facts and figures on domestic violence against women in U.S.

The domestic violence is defined as abusive behaviors in which one individual gains power over another individual. Domestic violence includes intimate partner violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. Intimate partner violence typically includes sexual or physical violence, psychological aggression, and stalking. This may include former or current intimate partners. Child abuse involves the emotional, sexual, physical, or neglect of a child under 18 by a parent, custodian, or caregiver that results in potential harm, harm, or a threat of harm, and elder abuse is a failure to act or an intentional act by a caregiver that causes or creates a risk of harm to an elder ((U.S. National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023).

Domestic violence is a common problem in the United States. Approximately 1 in 3 women 18 years of age or older experience domestic violence. Annually, domestic violence is responsible for over 1500 deaths in the United States. Domestic violence victims typically experience severe physical injuries requiring care at a hospital or clinic. The cost to individuals and society is significant. The national annual cost of medical and mental health care services related to acute domestic violence in U.S. is estimated at over \$8 billion. If the injury results in a long-term or chronic condition, the cost is considerably higher elder (U.S. National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023).

Also, domestic violence affects approximately 325,000 pregnant women each year in the United States. The average reported prevalence during pregnancy is approximately 30% emotional abuse, 15% physical abuse, and 8% sexual abuse. On the other hand, eighty to 90% of domestic violence victims abuse or neglect their children elder (U.S. National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023).

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship. Intimate partner refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners. IPV can include any of the physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Based on the CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), about 41% of women in the United States experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported a related impact. Also, over 61 million women have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Meanwhile, about 16 million women who reported experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime said that they first experienced it before age 18 (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Also, slightly more than 2 in 5 women (42.0% or 52 million) in the United States reported experiencing any physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime, 13.5% of women (16.9 million) reported being stalked by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and almost half of all women (49.4% or 61.7 million) reported any psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022: 6).

On the other hand, in 2022, in 58.1% (1,041 out of 1,793 victims) of homicides in the United States, in which females were murdered by a male they knew, the murderers were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders (The United States Violence Policy Center, 2024: 4).

Challenges in Combating Domestic and Sexual Violence

There are many challenges toward combating domestic violence against women in the United States. The existing decentralized legal system in this country creates inconsistencies, as protections of domestic violence's survivors vary significantly between states and even counties, leaving many survivors vulnerable. The U.S. law enforcement officers often lack specialized training, resulting in inadequate investigations and failure to recognize high-risk cases of domestic violence. Many women in this country are forced to enter into intimate relationships due to economic barriers for housing and employment protections etc. Consequently, due to the lack of the necessary legal obligations in intimate partner relationship, most domestic violence against women in the United States belongs to this group.

Also, cultural stigma continues to discourage reporting of domestic violence, particularly in marginalized communities (Native women and women in colour) where distrust of U.S. legal systems persists. The legal system presents numerous obstacles for survivors seeking protection through restraining orders or criminal charges. complex filing procedures, lack of legal representation, and uneven enforcement of orders create dangerous gaps in protection.

The Immigration status in U.S. further has complicated access to services, as many fear reporting domestic violence will lead to their deportation. Native American women face jurisdictional gaps on tribal lands where non-Native perpetrators often evade prosecution. In addition, these challenges have been exacerbated by chronic underfunding of victim services and prevention programs at both state and federal levels. These are just some of the challenges the United

States is currently facing in addressing domestic violence against women.

Recommendations

1. The U.S. legislation to combat domestic violence against women widely varies among States. Therefore, it is recommended to the U.S. government to establish a centralized federal task force to standardize domestic violence protections across all states, ensuring consistent legal safeguards for survivors regardless of jurisdiction. This task force would enforce mandatory training for law enforcement and judicial personnel on trauma-informed practices and risk assessment tools to improve responses to high-risk cases. By creating uniform protocols for restraining orders, and survivor support services, the government can address the current disparities that leave many women vulnerable.
2. Intimate partner violence in the United States, largely driven by economic pressures to afford housing, accounts for a large proportion of domestic violence against women in the country. Hence, it is recommended to the U.S. government to mitigate economic barriers that trap women in abusive relationships. For this basis, the U.S. Congress must expand funding for Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs).
3. In the United States, many perpetrators of domestic violence against women who are non-Native escape punishment for committing domestic violence against Native women in this country due to existing judicial loopholes. Therefore, it is recommended that the U.S. government to fully implement the Violence Against Women Act's (VAWA) tribal provisions by allocating resources to tribal courts for prosecuting non-Native perpetrators, thereby addressing jurisdictional loopholes that endanger Native women.

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