

This October, We're Talking About Domestic Violence Awareness in the District

By Jodi Kwarciany

October is known for many things – Halloween, seemingly all things pumpkin, and if you're a District resident, the hopeful reprieve from a hot, humid summer. But October also represents Domestic Violence Awareness month. DCFPI wants to take time this month to raise attention to this social issue that too often is invisible, and to share information on how you can get help—or get involved.

Domestic violence is defined as “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.”¹ This behavior may come in multiple forms – including physical, emotional, sexual, economic, or psychological abuse. Domestic violence can happen to people of any gender, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background.



Domestic violence occurs in all communities, including right here in the District. The Metropolitan Police Department received nearly 35,000 violence-related calls in 2015, according to the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence. That's one call every 15 minutes. During the same year, over 5,800 people sought help at DC's Domestic Violence Intake Centers, which assist people in obtaining civil protection orders, safety planning and referrals for legal assistance, housing and social services.

Domestic violence can have many harmful impacts beyond the abuse itself, especially among people who are vulnerable in other ways: 27 percent of families experiencing homelessness in the District reported a history of domestic violence, and 15 percent were currently homeless as a direct result of a violent incident.

Domestic violence also can disrupt a victims' health. There are strong links between intimate partner violence, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, according to [Futures Without Violence](#), an organization that works toward ending domestic and sexual violence. Such violence diminishes an individual's ability to manage their reproductive health, and can also affect their overall physical health. For example, expectant women who experienced abuse are 40-60 percent more likely to report conditions like high blood pressure or severe nausea during their pregnancy than those who did not, and are 37 percent more likely to deliver preterm babies. Subsequently, these newborns are also more likely to be born underweight and require more intensive care upon birth.

Thankfully, there is a lot that can be done to help decrease and prevent domestic abuse. Health care providers, particularly those in settings like family planning clinics, can screen for and counsel patients on

¹ “Domestic Violence,” Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>

domestic violence and reproductive coercion, and provide referrals to needed services and supports. Anyone get involved, by attending trainings on domestic violence prevention and healthy relationship promotion, or donating to organizations that work to combat domestic violence and support domestic violence survivors.

To learn more about the District’s work in combatting domestic violence, check out the [DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#). And, you can find events on the [Domestic Violence Awareness Month calendar](#).

If you are currently experiencing domestic violence, you are not alone – there are a many local [resources](#) available to help you understand your options, and for immediate assistance, never neglect to dial 911.