

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/why-engaging-abusive-men-with-histories-of-violence-promotes-the-safety-of-women-and-children>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

In recognition of [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), communities nationwide are hosting a range of activities to commemorate victims who lost their lives to violence, to recognize survivors in the process of healing, and to promote advances in legal policy and law enforcement practice that hold offenders accountable for their violent behavior. Women today, as in the past, remain the group most adversely affected by this violence, and their male partners remain the primary perpetrators. According to [Bureau of Justice Statistics \(BJS\)](#), women comprise 84 percent of spousal abuse victims.

[Other current data cited by the Bureau of Justice Statistics \(BJS\)](#) support the fact that females are more likely than males to be victims of nonfatal intimate partner violence: women between the ages of 20-24 are most at risk, and 1,640 women are killed every year by their male partners.

Higher prevalence rates of domestic violence against women are coupled with [apparent public indifference to the crime of domestic violence](#). Many people consider it a family issue that doesn't concern the general public.

As a society, we can't wait for the criminal justice system alone to respond to this problem. Rather, we must complement its efforts by developing and implementing community-based strategies that assist in the prevention and reduction of harm to women and children.

Over the past 10 years, domestic violence advocates and social justice stakeholders alike have started to explore if punitive criminal justice sanctions and court-ordered batterers treatment are enough to ensure the immediate as well as long-term safety of women and children who suffer domestic abuse. While firm justice responses are necessary tools for keeping women and children safe, they happen only after violence has occurred and been reported to the police.

Many cases of domestic violence, however, go unreported for a variety of reasons such as fear of retaliation, deportation because of illegal immigration status, and distrust of government systems like child welfare and law-enforcement. Leaders in the violence against women movement because of this phenomenon, are exploring strategies outside the criminal justice arena to ensure women's and children's safety. Moreover, proponents of social justice now view programs such as supervised visitation and exchange, which afford abusive men an opportunity to meet with their children in safe settings where engagement can take place, as a strategy to reduce risk and violence toward women and children.

[Vera's Supervised Visitation Initiative \(SVI\)](#) is assisting communities in enhancing their capacity to effectively serve separated families with a history of domestic violence in efforts to avoid re-victimization. SVI works with communities throughout the country to establish procedures in their supervised visitation programs that treat every person using services with respect and fairness while taking into account abuse that previously occurred within the family. Moreover, SVI trains supervised visitation staff in the community to establish respectful relationships with these fathers while at their center, rather than dehumanizing or colluding with them. Supervised visitation staff become better equipped to identify changes in behavior, such as verbal abuse, that may be precursors to violence, and thus more effectively deescalate such behavior.

Engaging men with a history of violence on a community level is critical because the child(ren) may seek to maintain a relationship with the abusive parent. The engagement of violent men in these settings can, in some cases, create a space for change and transformation and, at the same time, always keep victim safety and offender accountability prominently at the forefront.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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