Women’s Safety and Financial Independence

End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin

December 2014
Summary

Wisconsin women are drivers of Wisconsin’s economy. Over three-quarters of women in our state are in the workforce, and Wisconsin ranks tenth in the country for women’s workforce participation.1

Wisconsin women face safety concerns related to domestic violence in extraordinarily high numbers. 714,000 Wisconsin women have been physically abused, sexually assaulted or stalked by an intimate partner. Almost half a million of these women were fearful and concerned for their safety, and one-quarter of a million Wisconsin women were injured and needed medical care as a result of the abuse.2

Domestic abuse has significant financial consequences for women and, therefore, for the state’s economy. These consequences keep women trapped. Every physical domestic assault perpetrated against a woman results in an average of 7.2 days of missed work.3 Conservative estimates from the Centers for Disease Control find domestic violence results in losses of $10 billion per year for diminished productivity and health-care costs alone.4 Other reports have found the cost to employers to be as high as $45 billion annually.5 The financial costs of abuse produce a vicious cycle for victims because a lack of economic independence keeps victims tied to perpetrators.

Services for victims are effective at preventing repeat abuse and promoting women’s productivity and financial independence. When women have access to safe shelter, crisis support, counseling, and advocacy, their chances of escaping violence increase dramatically. Safety brings real economic benefits. In the last two years, it is estimated that domestic violence victim

714,000 Wisconsin women have been physically abused, sexually assaulted or stalked by an intimate partner.

7.2 days of missed work result, on average, from every physical domestic assault perpetrated against a woman.

An estimated 190,000 missed days of work were prevented over the last two years because victims had access to Wisconsin domestic violence service providers.

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4 Id. (figure adjusted for inflation).
service providers prevented close to 200,000 missed days of work. Breaking the cycle of abuse makes women more productive and economically independent. With services available, a vicious cycle is interrupted; enhanced safety produces economic benefits, which in turn lower the likelihood a survivor would be forced to stay with or return to an abuser.

**Wisconsin women are drivers of Wisconsin’s economy.**

Wisconsin women are drivers of Wisconsin’s economy, but they don’t necessarily gain equal economic benefits.

Over the last 50 years, women’s participation in the workforce has increased dramatically. The percentage of women working has increased 53% since 1963, and the percentage of working mothers has grown by 30% over the same period. Wisconsin exceeds the national average for women’s workforce participation, ranking tenth among all states. While on the whole women are still under-recognized as leaders in the business world and in the greater economy, the fact remains that an enormous amount of economic activity in Wisconsin is dependent on the work of women, both work that occurs in businesses and within the home.

Women’s place in the economy has not necessarily translated to equal potential for economic independence. As has been documented extensively elsewhere, women still make approximately 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. In families, woman bear greater burdens related to raising children and household work relative to men, even when both household members are employed outside on an equal basis. For women of color, barriers to economic equality and stability are compounded. Black and Latina women earn less than White women within occupational categories. They also earn less than Black and Latino men, respectively.

As will be discussed below, another cause of diminished economic opportunity is the disparate impact that domestic violence plays in the lives of Wisconsin women. Women who are not safe at home have less opportunity to be productive in the workplace and to reach their full economic potential. Part of the solution to improving the economic situation of women and strengthening our overall economy is to ensure that victims of domestic violence have the tools and resources they need to successfully break free from violence.

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6 Supra note 1.


Wisconsin women face safety concerns related to domestic violence in extraordinarily high numbers.

The number of Wisconsin women who have been victims of domestic violence is staggering. In our state, 714,000 women have been physically abused, sexually assaulted or stalked by an intimate partner. Therefore, the total number of women victimized in Wisconsin is greater than population of Milwaukee and Green Bay combined. Women affected by domestic abuse are our family members, our friends and our neighbors.

Most of the 714,000 women who have been victimized in their lifetimes experience significant disruptions to their lives. About half a million Wisconsin women were fearful and concerned for their safety as a result of the violence. This suggests that, in the lives of most women who experience abuse, the act of violence was not a onetime event or an isolated occurrence. Rather, most victims understand that they are in danger of being abused repeatedly. The trauma and fear of not being safe in one’s home takes a remarkable toll. In terms of physical injury, one-quarter of a million Wisconsin women have been injured and needed medical care as a result of the abuse.

Focus on Women

This report looks at the economic impact of domestic violence on women. This focus should not be interpreted to imply that domestic violence does not occur against men. Domestic violence can and does affect individuals from every demographic category, including men. However, the effects of domestic violence are not felt evenly. Women are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence, and when women are victims the disruption and impact to their daily lives tends to be intensely more profound compared to male victims as a group. Therefore, the economic impacts of abuse on women tend to be much more pronounced.

- Women victims are **four times** more likely than victims who are men to be beaten, **six times** more likely to be slammed against something and **nine times** more likely to be strangled or suffocated.
- Female victims are approximately **five times** more likely to be fearful and concerned for their safety as a result of violence than male victims.
- Female victims are **five times** more likely to need medical care and **six times** more likely to need housing services as consequences of the violence.

National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey
Domestic abuse has significant financial consequences for women and, therefore, for the state’s economy. These consequences keep women trapped.

Financial insecurity is both a catalyst and product of the physical violence women experience in their families. Domestic violence thrives when victims have few financial resources for escape. Economic instability and poverty are associated with higher rates of abuse. An inability to survive financially without the abuser is the most common reason abused women give for staying in violent relationships, and an independent source of income is the single most significant indicator that a woman will permanently leave an abuser.

Moreover, domestic violence makes women and their children more financially insecure. Most notably, unchecked violence reduces women’s productivity and prospects for steady employment.

Approximately, one-quarter to over one-half of domestic violence victims report losing their jobs as a result of abuse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that every physical domestic assault perpetrated against a woman results in an average of 7.2 days of missed work. The CDC also found that the average health-care costs for each domestic physical assault against a woman was $816. Adjusted for inflation, that translates to $1,052. According to the CDC data, the average victim experienced 3.4 such assaults in a given year.

There are several reasons for these impacts. Abusers often intentionally sabotage victims’ employment to keep victims dependent. Additionally, dealing with the medical and legal consequences of repeated acts of violence often entails work absences. Moreover, when violence persists, immediate injuries become long-term health conditions. Abused women report poorer long-term health and disproportionately suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and central nervous conditions. If not addressed, these ailments make it more difficult for abused women to be financially independent and support themselves and their children. The totality of these financial costs can become debilitating. High rates of abused women become homeless.

11 Supra note 5.
14 Supra note 2..
Lastly, the costs of abuse are felt on a wider level. The CDC estimates the total annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence nationally is $1.17 billion nationally (inflation adjusted), with more than 7.9 million paid workdays, or more than 32,000 full time jobs, lost each year.\textsuperscript{18} When health-care costs are added, losses from domestic violence total $10 billion a year.\textsuperscript{19} Other reports have found the cost to employers to be as high as $45 billion annually.\textsuperscript{20} Governments also bear significant expenses related to law enforcement, court time, corrections and social services. In many communities, one-third of all police calls are related to domestic abuse.\textsuperscript{21} Additionally, abuse results in other burdens that government is eventually forced to deal with, including problems related to child welfare and development.\textsuperscript{22}

**Services for victims are effective at preventing repeat abuse and promoting women’s productivity and financial independence.**

Wisconsin has solutions to preventing repeat abuse, reducing its economic consequences and promoting the financial security of victims. Local domestic violence shelters and services providers make enormous differences in the lives of victims. These agencies provide temporary housing, counseling, advocacy and other supportive services that have been shown to prevent future violence. These service providers also help children who have been exposed to domestic violence heal. Trauma-informed services for children greatly increase the chances that children will not carry the pain and dynamics of abuse forward with them in their adult relationships.

In the last annual reporting period, over 35,000 women, children and men received help from local domestic violence victim service providers in Wisconsin. Of these individuals, close to 7,000 stayed in domestic violence shelters. Over half of these sheltered individuals were children, who along with their parents would likely have either remained in a dangerous home or been homeless had it not been for the shelter.

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\textsuperscript{19} Id.
\textsuperscript{18} Id.
\textsuperscript{20} Supra note 5.
Because of practical and ethical barriers, it is usually very difficult or impossible to determine with a scientific degree of certainty the precise degree to which services are effective. Practically, it is difficult to track and gather data from domestic violence victims over a long period of time to determine the degree to which the services were effective. Second, from an ethical and logistical standpoint, researchers often do not have a comparable control group to use when evaluating victim services. Victims of domestic violence who are in danger cannot and should not have their access to services limited in order to compare unassisted victims’ outcomes with victims who did receive services. Several studies have attempted to measure the effectiveness of domestic violence services.

While more research would be helpful, the current set of data does provide an opportunity to estimate a segment of averted costs when Wisconsin invests in services that prevent the repeat incidence of domestic violence.

First, research has shown that victims’ increased social support and knowledge of community resources leads to increased safety and significantly lower rates of abuse over time.\textsuperscript{23} Wisconsin domestic violence service providers routinely perform process evaluations to assess whether the services they provide are leading to these changes that have been specifically shown to lead to positive outcomes for victims and their children. Consistently, victim services providers find that the vast majority of the victims they work with report that the services have improved their situation in ways that are linked to a reduction in domestic violence. Typically, these positive indicators are present with over 90% of victims that receive services in Wisconsin. In the last reporting year, 91.1% of surveyed victims indicated that as a result of receiving services they knew more ways to plan for their safety, and 89.8% of victims said they knew more about community resources.

In another study, a true experimental design was implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of victim programs.\textsuperscript{24} In the study, one in four abused women who worked with an advocate from a community-based domestic violence victim service provider did not experience any reoccurrences of the violence in the following 12 months. In a similar group of abused women who did not receive these services, only one in ten women were able to remain violence-free for one year.


From this research, we can conclude that receiving services at a domestic violence service provider greatly increases the chances a victim will escape violence long-term. Moreover, the extraordinarily positive process evaluations for over 90% of victims indicates that even those victims who experience some level of repeat violence are safer as a result of receiving services and will experience less violence and greater well-being over time.

Reducing violence promotes women’s productivity and financial independence.

Domestic violence victim services in Wisconsin prevent many thousands of missed days of work due to injury or trauma. Domestic violence’s impact on employers and productivity is discussed above. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate every physical domestic assault perpetrated against a woman results in an average of 7.2 days of missed work. Applying the data that indicates receiving services greatly increases the number of victims who escape abuse long-term, our best estimate is that Wisconsin domestic violence service providers prevented approximately 190,000 lost days of work in our state in the last two years. This estimate is based on an understanding that a domestic assault on a woman, on average, results in 7.2 missed days of work and that an abused woman experiences 3.4 such assaults a year. In this calculation, we only consider the percentage of female victims who are estimated to have experienced a complete elimination of the violence because of receiving victim services. Therefore, it is almost certainly an undercount.

There are other economic benefits that flow from an elimination of the abuse. For example, preventing the onset or alleviating the symptoms of trauma-related health conditions pay dividends for survivors’ overall well-being, future productivity and earning potential. Moreover, costs to government are reduced in various ways, including avoided need for police response, court time and corrections resources. While it is not possible to capture every or even most of the benefits, economic analysis shows for every dollar invested in victim services, $9.25 is saved in property losses, health-care expenses, police response, lost productivity and other costs.

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25 Supra note 2.
**Additional investments would pay dividends**

While domestic violence victim service providers have contributed to increasing survivor’s overall well-being and productivity, much more could be done. Currently in Wisconsin, approximately 250 requests for services from victims of domestic violence go unmet every day because of a lack of funding and capacity. Last year, close to 10,000 requests for emergency shelter from victims could not be met (this number does not factor in the number of children of victims who also were unable to obtain shelter). When victims’ access to help is delayed or withheld because services are not available, the consequences are considerable. We should act now to ensure that all victims have access to the lifesaving help they need. Working together, we can create a safer and stronger Wisconsin.

**Note about Limitations**

In many respects, this report is likely a very low estimate of the savings produced by domestic violence prevention efforts. The report represents estimates based on the best data available. It does not quantify savings with scientific accuracy.