



FACT SHEET

If You Really Care About Intimate Partner Violence,¹ You Should Care About Reproductive Justice

April 2013

What is Reproductive Justice?

The Reproductive Justice (RJ) movement places reproductive health and rights within a social justice framework.² The movement supports the right of individuals to have the children they want, raise the children they have, and plan their families through safe, legal access to abortion and contraception. In order to make these rights a reality, the movement recognizes that Reproductive Justice will only be achieved when all people have the resources, as well as the economic, social, and political power to make healthy decisions about their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction.³

A society that respects the sexual and procreative rights of each individual will be a society with less violence against women, and that provides greater support to those who experience violence within their relationships. By advancing RJ, you are working toward the elimination of violence against women.

How Can Advancing Reproductive Justice Reduce Violence Against Women?

Addressing the racial and socioeconomic inequities that deny some women Reproductive Justice will also reduce instances of violence and help victims escape their abusive relationship.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), including sexual, physical, emotional and economic abuse, affects the lives of women across all races and income levels.⁴ Nonetheless, women of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds experience different rates of violence. Poverty, unemployment and substance use are all predictors of IPV.⁵ IPV may contribute to higher rates of unintended pregnancy and escalate during pregnancy.⁶ One study found that a woman's odds of experiencing IPV rose by 10% with each pregnancy.⁷

Historic inequities in access to education and economic opportunity result in socioeconomic disparities and contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in IPV. American Indian and Alaskan women have higher rates of nonfatal IPV as compared to either Black or White women,⁸ but Black women account for 22% of all intimate partner homicide victims.⁹ Linguistic and cultural barriers may keep many women from seeking help. Some women may fear authorities even more than their batterer.¹⁰ A batterer may threaten to expose the victim's immigration status as a way to maintain control. In states such as New York law enforcement departments encourage all crime victims to report abuse by directing officers not to "inquire about the immigration status of crime victims, witness, or others who call or approach the

police seeking assistance.”¹¹ By contrast, states with strictly enforced anti-immigration laws deter immigrant women from interacting with law enforcement and reporting abuse.¹² In some places, women can be evicted after calling the police to report IPV.¹³ Other women may have trouble accessing culturally appropriate services in the language they are most comfortable speaking.¹⁴

The social and economic costs of IPV include isolation from friends and family, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities,¹⁵ and limited ability to care for themselves and their children.¹⁶ These outcomes perpetuate a lack of control and autonomy for victims, exacerbating the power their abusers may have over them.

Further, while it is difficult for any woman experiencing violence to end her relationship, the need to provide for a child makes escaping far more difficult for some mothers. Children who are exposed to violence also face long term effects, and are more likely to have violent relationships themselves.¹⁷

Controlling a woman's sexual and reproductive life is often a component of abuse, so restrictions on access to family planning and abortion keep women both physically and financially vulnerable.

An abuser may try to get a woman pregnant in order to keep her economically dependent and physically vulnerable. Health professionals report seeing cases of young men who use various techniques to control women's reproductive lives, including demanding unprotected sex, lying about “pulling out,” hiding or destroying birth control, and preventing abortion.¹⁸

Governmental restrictions on family planning and abortion services only further abusers efforts to control their victims. Because a woman experiencing IPV has greater difficulties negotiating contraception with her abusive partner, it is especially important that she has access to methods that are not dependent on a partner's cooperation, or that can be used without her partner's knowledge.¹⁹

In striking down a requirement that women notify their husbands before obtaining an abortion, the Supreme Court acknowledged, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, that such a requirement could result in a woman being abused. The Supreme Court explains that requiring a woman to notify her husband of a pregnancy “is frequently a flashpoint for battering and violence,” including physical and psychological abuse.²⁰ Nevertheless, states continue to pass laws that limit women's access to abortion, even going so far as to prohibit abortions as early as six weeks.²¹ Although these bans severely restrict all women's access to abortion, victims of IPV may face extra hurdles in seeking abortion care, making it harder for them to access abortion in such a limited time frame. Because pregnancy increases the risk of IPV, these bans may actually increase IPV by forcing women in abusive relationships to carry a pregnancy to term.

When women are not provided the basic resources to raise their children, including those related to health services, they may be left economically dependent on their abusers.

Reproductive justice demands that we work to improve economic conditions for women who want to parent. A woman may stay with an abuser if he is the only means of financial support for her child. Policies that improve economic conditions for women and their families help women escape violent relationships.

Women may feel forced to stay in abusive relationships for fear of not being able to feed their children. Abusers may limit a victim's access to financial resources, external support networks, and employment as means of control. This economic coercion may force the victim to choose between remaining in the abusive relationship and economic hardship—including poverty and homelessness—for

herself and her children.²² Likewise, policies that increase women's ability to care for their children, such as strong child support enforcement,²³ and subsidized child care,²⁴ increase low-income women's ability to escape violent relationships.

An abuser may also force a woman to stay by threatening to seek sole custody of her child. Judges, unaware of the dynamics of abuse, may actually penalize a woman who is in an abusive relationship by removing her children from her, instead of invoking the power of the state to protect her from abuse.²⁵

How You Can Combat Intimate Partner Violence and Support Reproductive Justice

- Advocate for access to comprehensive reproductive health care. Because abusers often isolate their victims, contact with a health care provider can present a rare opportunity for a woman who is being abused to get help.
- Oppose restrictions on access to family planning services and abortion, which are especially burdensome to women who are experiencing violence and do not want to become pregnant or continue their pregnancies.
- Support laws and policies that improve economic conditions for low-income women, so women have the financial ability to leave abusive relationships.
- Help spread the word about provisions in the health care law that can help combat IPV and protect women. These health care law:
 - Will prohibit insurance plans from denying coverage to women because of intimate partner violence beginning in 2014.²⁶
 - Requires health insurance to cover routine screening and counseling of intimate partner violence with no cost sharing.²⁷
 - Requires health insurance plans to cover contraception with no cost sharing, including longer term forms of contraception, such as the intrauterine device, which can be used without a woman's partner knowing.²⁸
 - Provides grants to States to implement evidence-based Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Visitation programs that offer home based services to pregnant women and families with newborns. In one study, up to 48% of the women surveyed who had participated in a home visiting program reported incidents of intimate partner violence.²⁹ Home visitation programs are, therefore, in a unique position to identify intimate partner violence and provide resources and assistance to help women leave violent relationships.

IF YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE • FACT SHEET

- 1 While men may also experience partner violence, and violence may occur between same-sex partners or among family members such as siblings or between parent and child, this fact sheet addresses the type of violence most closely related to limitations on Reproductive Justice, that between a male perpetrator and a female victim. Eighty-five percent of IPV victims are women. SHANNAN CATALANO, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, SPECIAL REPORT: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, 1993-2010 at 3 (2012), available at <http://bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ipv9310.pdf>.
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- 24 To find out how you can advocate for increased funding for child care, please visit the National Women's Law Center's Child Care page at <http://www.nwlc.org/display.cfm?section=childcare>.
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