

# When someone you love hurts you

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Domestic abuse often unreported, unrecognized, and untreated in emergency departments

In *Othello*, one of Shakespeare's great tragic plays, the main character is so consumed by his jealousy and suspicion of his wife's infidelity that he verbally abuses her and ultimately kills her by suffocating her.

Incidences of domestic abuse are common in literature and the arts. The reality of domestic abuse today is a growing concern for physicians and other groups in society. Domestic violence is believed to be the leading cause of injury of women between the ages of 15 and 44.

An article in this issue of *JAMA* (page 433) reports that almost 37% of women seen in hospital emergency departments say they have experienced domestic abuse during their lifetimes. Yet past research has shown that as few as 5% of battered women are identified and treated by emergency department staff. The study also reports that 14% of women say they have experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past year, and 2% say they came to the hospital as a result of injuries they

suffered from abuse.

The researchers believe that emergency department staffs need to be more aware of domestic abuse, be able to recognize and treat abused women, and possibly prevent future abuse.

*Additional Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, American College of Emergency Physicians*

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

**Domestic violence** (also called partner abuse or spouse abuse) is physical abuse committed by a spouse, a former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or a cohabitant upon another person. It is currently estimated that a domestic violence act occurs on average every 15 seconds in the United States alone, which translates to more than 2.5 million victims each year. **Battering**, a form of domestic abuse, is establishing control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse, such as intimidation, threats, psychological abuse, or isolation.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

- If you see or hear an incident of domestic violence, call the police immediately.
- If you suspect that a co-worker, friend, neighbor, or loved one is being abused, you may want to consider getting involved by talking to or encouraging them to seek help.
- Help others learn about domestic violence. Consider inviting speakers to your religious institution, community group, or workplace.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE A VICTIM?

If you are a victim of domestic violence, call your emergency medical services number (such as 911 in the United States and Canada) or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800/799-SAFE.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800/799-SAFE  
800/787-3224 (TTY)  
[www.usdoj.gov/vawo/](http://www.usdoj.gov/vawo/)
- American College of Emergency Physicians  
SASE (business size) to:  
ACEP  
*Domestic Violence*  
1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 650  
Washington, DC 20036  
202/728-0610, ext. 3006 or  
[www.acep.org/public/ac700000.htm](http://www.acep.org/public/ac700000.htm)

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