



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

When Closeness Goes Wrong

Adverse Health Conditions and Health Risk Behaviors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence — United States, 2005

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[Announcer] *This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Shaw] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Dr. Frederic Shaw, Editor of MMWR and your host for this week.

For decades, scientific studies have shown that closeness and intimacy with another person is good for your health. But violence between intimate partners can have the opposite effect. Researchers at CDC recently found that people who experience violence from an intimate partner can have more chronic diseases. Dr. Michele Black is a researcher in CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and she coauthored the research on intimate partner violence. She joins us today to discuss the issue. Welcome to the show, Michele.

[Dr. Black] Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with you.

[Dr. Shaw] Michele, I'm sure intimate partner violence is not a new problem, but is it becoming better understood these days?

[Dr. Black] Yes. That is correct. Intimate partner violence has been a social issue throughout history, but over the past several decades, it's also been recognized as something that seriously harms the person who experiences it and the children who see it happen. The bad impact isn't just what happens at the time of the abuse. For example, injuries, bruises, the fear that it causes, the loss of self esteem — the impact can last for months and even years.

[Dr. Shaw] Is intimate partner violence mostly a one-time event or is it an ongoing occurrence?

[Dr. Black] It certainly can be a one-time event, but that is not what happens most often. Intimate partner violence can include a lot of different actions, not just physical abuse, like punches and kicks that leave bruises and other injuries. It also includes emotional abuse, sometimes forced sex, threats, things that cause fear and intimidation. And for a few women who are victims, the abuse can be relatively minor — it happens a few times and then its over. For most victims, however, the abuse is more severe, and it can go on for years or even decades.

[Dr. Shaw] Now you said that it affects both sexes. Does it affect men and women equally?

[Dr. Black] It is not just a problem for women, but it doesn't affect women and men equally. It's a problem for women and men and the children who observed it, and it can occur in opposite sex and same sex relationships. But, overall, women are much more likely to be the victim of all forms of intimate partner violence. And the violence that happens to women is more likely to be severe and more likely to cause major consequences because of the difference in size and physical strength between men and women. But it's important not to focus only on physical violence and the resulting bruises and other injuries that you can see. We know that the long-term mental and physical health consequences of emotional abuse can be even more damaging. The victim in the abusive relationship often feels a loss of control in their lives, and this loss of control and the feelings of entrapment are one of the root causes of the ongoing stress of intimate partner violence.

[Dr. Shaw] You said that this is an emotional issue, not just a physical one. Do you find that victims of intimate partner violence are willing to talk openly about the issue?

[Dr. Black] Yes. Often they are willing to talk openly about the issue. CDC's done several studies that show people who experience partner violence and sexual violence are willing to answer questions about abuse, even in surveys like the one in our most recent report. The majority of people, more than 90 percent, whether or not they were victims of abuse, think such questions should be asked and they're not upset or afraid to answer such questions. Having said that, there are safety considerations that must be taken into account. The information must be kept confidential and private, individuals need to feel safe and feel like they aren't being judged, and that they will not be overheard by someone who could harm them.

[Dr. Shaw] If a person has experienced intimate partner violence, what kinds of illnesses are they more likely to have?

[Dr. Black] Our study showed that those who experienced intimate partner violence — and an intimate partner can be a current or a former spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, someone you're dating — those who experience intimate partner violence also reported a range of adverse outcomes and health risk behaviors. And these included things like asthma, arthritis, stroke, and also increased heavy or binge drinking, smoking, and risk factors that put them at risk for such things as HIV or sexually transmitted diseases.

[Dr. Shaw] So, did your research find that intimate partner violence *causes* these chronic diseases?

[Dr. Black] We can't say that on the basis of the information we get from the survey. Survey data don't show whether intimate partner violence causes these health problems or health risk behaviors. Our study was able to demonstrate a link between intimate partner violence and these health outcomes and behaviors but not why or how they may be linked. There could be several things contributing. The perpetrator of violence may control the money and may limit the victim's access to health care or their ability to purchase medications, but research outside of CDC also suggests that one of the

underlying mechanisms that might link intimate partner violence and health problems is the body's response to long-term and ongoing stress, and stress is also linked to several health problems like heart disease, asthma, and heavy drinking.

[Dr. Shaw] So what are the key messages you want our listeners to take away from this?

[Dr. Black] Well, first of all, it's important for our listeners to know that intimate partner violence is preventable. CDC's ultimate goal is to prevent intimate partner violence before it even begins in the first place. One of CDC's prevention programs is the Choose Respect Initiative, which is launched in 2006, and it's a multimedia program designed to teach 12 to 14-year-olds how to have healthy, respectful relationships and how to recognize unhealthy and harmful relationships. And the goal is teach these things early, before dating even begins.

[Dr. Shaw] Is there anything else?

[Dr. Black] In addition to preventing abuse before it happens, preventing further harm from those who've already experienced abuse or observed it, as children often do, is also important. And if a doctor or nurse or a caring individual asks about intimate partner violence in a way that the abuser is not going to overhear and retaliate and if the victim can be referred to and get the access to the resources they need, then not only can you prevent further abuse, the abuse can be stopped, but you're also likely to have a long-term impact on the overall health of the abused and the children who witness it.

[Dr. Shaw] Where can our listeners get more information about the issue of intimate partner violence?

[Dr. Black] Listeners who are concerned about intimate partner violence either in their own lives or for someone they care about can call the confidential National Domestic Violence Hotline. The number is 1-800-799-SAFE. Listeners can also learn more about intimate partner violence by going to CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's website, which is www.cdc.gov/ncipc.

[Dr. Shaw] Michele thanks for sharing this information with us today.

[Dr. Black] Thank you. It was my pleasure.

[Dr. Shaw] That's it for this week's show. We hope you'll join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Frederic Shaw for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family, and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.