

# Domestic & Family Violence Dynamics in Asian and Pacific Islander Homes

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21 – 55% of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime  
[Facts & Stats Report \(2015\)](#)

## Definitions

Domestic violence is a systematic pattern of behaviors that include physical battering, coercive control, economic abuse, emotional abuse, and/or sexual violence. It is intended to gain or maintain power and control over a romantic or intimate partner to intimidate, frighten, humiliate, blame, subjugate, traumatize, or injure. It can happen to anyone of any age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, religion, education level, or socioeconomic background; regardless of whether couples are married, living together, dating, or hooking-up.

Coercive control is defined by Evan Stark as “a strategic course of conduct designed to retain privilege and establish domination in personal life based on fear, dependence, and the deprivation of basic rights and liberties.” The coercive control model “defines abuse as a malevolent course of conduct; identifies the hallmarks of abusive assaults [by] their frequency and ‘routine’ nature rather than their severity; anticipates the use of a range of coercive and controlling tactics in addition to or instead of physical violence; and assesses risk, including the risk of fatality, on the basis of a woman’s subjective level of fear and her objective entrapment rather than the level of violence or injury.”

Domestic violence is more than a series of violent incidents on an identifiable cycle. It is about living in a climate of fear and disempowering restrictions that threaten and affect one’s selfhood, psychological well-being, health, economic independence, and emotional availability for parenting.

Couples’ conflict is distinct from domestic violence - all relationships experience conflicts, disagreements, fights, angry arguments, harsh words, unwilling compromises, resentments, selfish decisions, pain and anguish. In healthy relationships, couples use a variety of behaviors and strategies to cope with or resolve their conflicts without resorting to domestic violence.

## Analysis

### Abuse Cannot Be Explained by Stress or Marginalized Identity

Domestic violence is gendered: 1 in 4 women are victims of violence by an intimate partner (including sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking), compared to 1 in 9 men. Female survivors experience disproportionate impacts: 73% reported at least one impact (including feeling fearful, concern for safety, and PTSD symptoms), compared to 36% of male survivors ([CDC: NISVS 2010-2012 State Report](#)).

Stress and marginalized identities are not explanations for abuse. Women have the same life experiences and stresses: they come from violent homes, they have childhood histories of abuse, neglect or abandonment, they get cut off on the freeway, they get high or drunk, they get fired from their jobs, they juggle economic hardships, etc. Women are socialized in cultures with legacies of colonialism, live in war zones, endure racism, deal with new cultures as immigrants and face societal and linguistic barriers. And yet, women by and large do not resort to physical abuse. Non-abusive men are also subject to the same stressors. Women and non-abusive men do of course have personal and inter-personal difficulties, psychological problems, feel depressed, lack parenting insights, have inadequate job skills, are constrained by poverty, but cope without resorting to violence. Finally, men who do not have any of these difficulties or deficits, batter. It is important, therefore, to de-link external factors as the root causes of domestic violence.

## Differing Dynamics in Asian and Pacific Islander Homes

Domestic violence is a universal problem, but its cultural expressions differ. Drawing attention to such differences can serve to confirm stereotypes because nuanced complexities are hard to convey, but advocacy that is not rooted in cultural contexts is even more problematic. API survivors experience types of domestic violence on the power and control wheel, but they also face differing patterns, types and dynamics. The latter are described below.

### Multiple Batterers, Single Victim

- ◆ Perpetrators can include marital family members: husbands, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, ex-wives, new wives, and/or members of a woman's natal family – her parents, aunts, uncles, or adult siblings.
- ◆ Multiple batterers may act separately, each using different types of abuse.
- ◆ Multiple batterers can act together, playing different roles in one incident.
- ◆ In-laws may encourage or support domestic violence, but not perpetrate it themselves.
- ◆ Multiple abusers may use coercive control tactics; exercise micro-controls on daily movements - monitoring, tracking, and reporting on them; or exert power and control from afar through texting, webcams, and other technologies.

### Push & Pull Factors

- ◆ Push factors are meant to 'push' her out of the relationship, rather than draw her back in.
- ◆ Pull factors are behaviors and statements that 'pull' or lure her back into the relationship by offering apologies, reassurances and promises to change.
- ◆ Asian women report feeling pushed out of the relationship or marital home (with statements such as "leave the house, give me a divorce, I can always find another wife") more frequently than they are pulled or enticed back into it.
- ◆ Push and pull factors affect how survivors make decisions, especially about leaving.

### Physical Violence Can Include...

- ◆ Battering by multiple abusers including male and female in-laws.
- ◆ Stalking: monitoring activities and visitors (often utilizing multiple technologies), exercising abusive controls from afar, cyber-stalking.
- ◆ Withholding food, healthcare, medication, adequate clothing, hygiene products, etc.
- ◆ Hyper-exploitation of household labor to serve members of the extended family.
- ◆ Homicides that can include honor killings, contract killings, dowry related deaths, killing a female partner's family members, or driving her to commit suicide.
- ◆ Forced divorce of first wives as a precursor to contracting abusive international marriages.

### Emotional Abuse Can Include...

- ◆ 'Push' factors that involve forcing a partner out of the relationship more frequently than 'pull' factors to come back into the relationship.
- ◆ Tightly prescribed and more rigid gender roles for women and men.
- ◆ Severe isolation by inhibiting contact with family and support systems.
- ◆ Using religion and culture to justify abuse; enforcing the nexus of shame and public disclosure to silence victims; blaming them for bringing dishonor to the family.
- ◆ Threatening loss of children, social status, financial support and community.
- ◆ Pressure from the natal family to stay in the marriage and tolerate the abuse.
- ◆ Mental health and substance abuse coercion: tactics used by batterers to "undermine [the survivor's] sanity or sobriety, to control their medication and treatment, or to sabotage their recovery and access to resources and support" ([NCDVTMH, 2014](#))

## Sexual Violence Can Include...

- ◆ Excessive restrictions designed to control and threaten women's sexuality.
- ◆ Blaming victims for rape, incest or coerced sex; being forced to marry one's rapist.
- ◆ Justifying marital rape by claiming sex is a husband's right.
- ◆ Sexual violence before, during and after pregnancy.
- ◆ Denying the right to choose or express a different sexual orientation.
- ◆ Being forced to watch and imitate pornography.
- ◆ Bodily humiliation/body-shaming (can also be perpetrated by female in-laws); coerced body modification
- ◆ Coercion into unprotected sex, potentially resulting in elevated risk for STIs/STDs or HIV, often by transnational husbands/partners with second families or engaged in sex tourism.
- ◆ Extreme sexual neglect, coldness, and jealousy; forcing women to tolerate infidelity.
- ◆ Birth control sabotage.
- ◆ Sexual harassment from workplace supervisors, co-workers, family members, community leaders, landlords, or clergy.
- ◆ Forced (not arranged) marriages, resulting in marital rape.

## Abuse of Women Who Are Mothers Can Include...

- ◆ Using a woman's history of sexual abuse either perpetrated by state actors in war zones, refugee camps, on unsafe immigration routes, against cultural minorities, or in the home by private actors to further demean, reject, silence, blame or violate her.
- ◆ Forced or sex-selected abortions, or multiple, repeated pregnancies to bear sons.
- ◆ False reports and accusations to social services, child protection, immigration, and/or criminal, family and civil legal systems, so mothers lose custody of their children.
- ◆ Separating mothers from children by sending children to paternal grandparents or by abducting the couple's children and returning them to the batterer's home country.
- ◆ Stigmatizing divorced women as unfit mothers.
- ◆ Using religion and culture to claim that children belong to their father, so that mothers lose custody.

## Same Sex, Same Gender Domestic Violence Can Include...

- ◆ Greater harms, threats, risks, and fears are associated with same-sex domestic violence in ethnic communities that severely ostracize homosexuality.
- ◆ Outing a partner, or threatening to, are part of the abuse and heightened risks.
- ◆ Perpetrators claim to be victims and can be credible to service providers untrained in addressing same-sex domestic violence.
- ◆ Lesbians and gay men are set up in forced marriages by their parents.
- ◆ Homophobia is used by same-sex abusers to silence their partners or keep them closeted.

## Abuse Based on Immigration Status Can Include...

- ◆ Abusers making false declarations to I.C.E., claiming that a wife entered into a fraudulent marriage.
- ◆ Failing to regularize a spouse's immigration status, leaving them undocumented.
- ◆ Threatening deportation.
- ◆ Withholding or hiding passports and other important documents.
- ◆ Trans-national abandonment after a long relationship or within a few months, referred to as "marry-and-dump"
- ◆ Serial marriages, entrapment or abandonment of foreign brides.
- ◆ Abusers using survivors' lack of English proficiency to manipulate systems.

# A to Addressing Cultural Contexts

Analyzing and identifying differing dynamics lies at the core of culturally-specific, survivor-centered programming and has been continually practiced by Asian and Pacific Islander serving agencies across the U.S. [A-Z Advocacy Model: Asians and Pacific Islanders Build an Inventory of Evidence-Informed Practices \(2017\)](#) details the multi-layered community contexts API agencies have integrated into their intervention and prevention efforts, and the community and systems advocacy they have done to shift the rigid cultural structures that lead to violence and the devaluation of women.

For survivors, services that center cultural analysis means not having to explain cultural and familial contexts, not feeling scrutinized because they are not acculturated or criticized for being “Americanized,” and not fearing that disclosing abuse will be sensationalized to confirm racial stereotypes. They allow survivors to have control over their own paths to healing, while preserving their safety and connection to community.

## The 160 community-based organizations (CBOs) surveyed in the A-Z Model Report reported providing...

Services to **56** distinct API ethnicities:

**41** Asian ethnicities

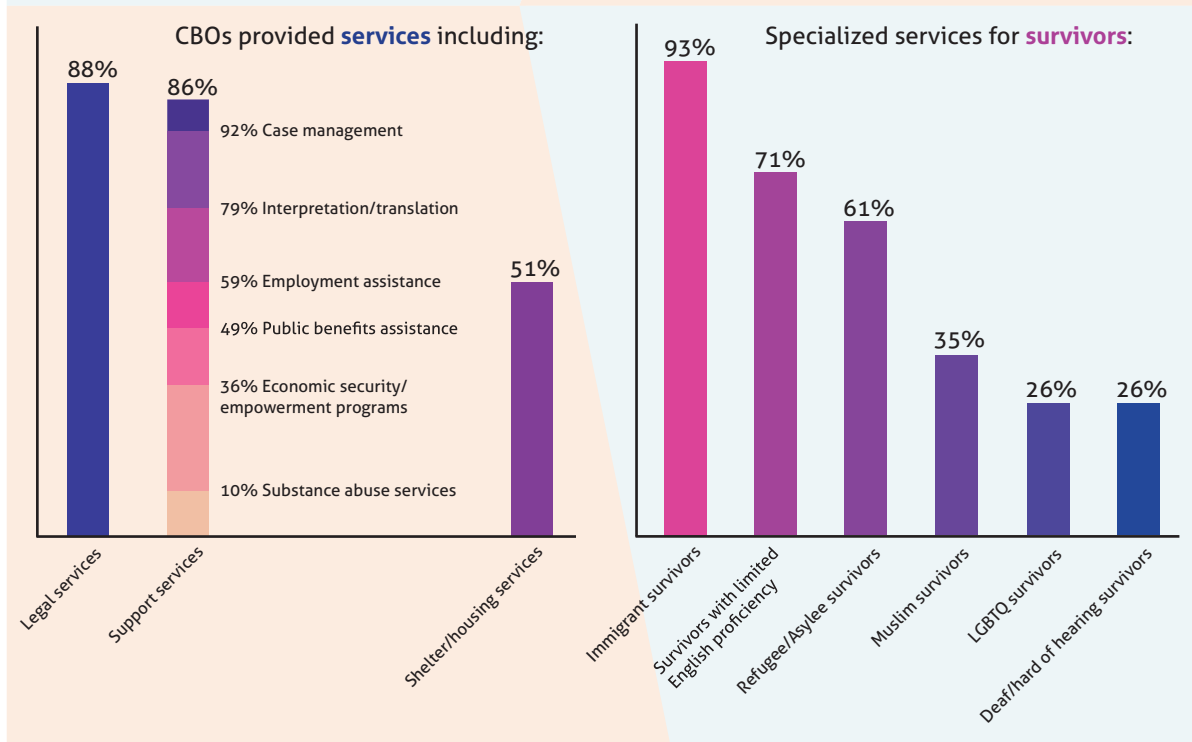
**15** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ethnicities

Services in **121** languages:

**75** Asian and Pacific Islander languages

**46** Non-API languages

**91%** provide services in languages other than English



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