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Domestic Violence

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Introduction

It is well known that every family experiences conflict from time to time, but that conflict should never turn into abuse. Unfortunately, domestic violence continues to affect thousands of people across Illinois every year. Domestic violence is more than physical abuse between spouses or partners. It also includes emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, and psychological abuse that one person uses to gain power and control over another. Victims often live in fear for months or even years before seeking help, and many never report the abuse at all.

Although Illinois has strengthened laws protecting victims and expanded services for survivors, domestic violence remains one of the state's most serious public safety and public health issues. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, domestic violence-related deaths have increased in recent years. The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported 137 domestic violence-related homicides in 2024, compared to 120 in 2023, showing that this issue continues to affect communities throughout the state.

Domestic violence affects not only the victim but also children, families, schools, workplaces, and entire communities. Many victims struggle with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and financial hardship long after the abuse has ended. Children who grow up witnessing domestic violence often experience emotional trauma and may have difficulty forming healthy relationships later in life.

Throughout this paper, I will discuss what domestic violence is, why it happens, the long-term effects it has on victims and families, how Illinois is working to address the issue, and what more can be done to reduce domestic violence throughout the state. I will also explain why this topic is important to me and why I believe every survivor deserves safety, support, and a chance to rebuild their life.

Background Information

Before discussing ways to solve this issue, it is important to understand what domestic violence is and why it happens. Many people believe domestic violence only refers to physical abuse, but it includes many different forms of controlling behavior. According to the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors used by one person to gain power and control over another person in intimate or family relationships. Abuse may include hitting, choking, threats, stalking, emotional manipulation, isolation from family and friends, controlling finances, or forcing someone into sexual activity.

There is no single reason why someone becomes abusive. Researchers have found that domestic violence often develops from several factors working together. Individuals who experienced abuse as children may be more likely to repeat those behaviors as adults. Other contributing factors include substance abuse, untreated mental illness, financial stress, unemployment, and unhealthy beliefs about relationships and control. While these factors may increase the risk of abuse, they never excuse violent behavior.

Children are often the silent victims of domestic violence. Even if they are not physically harmed, witnessing abuse inside the home can have lifelong effects. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority reports that domestic violence is the most common form of violence experienced by children exposed to traumatic events. Many children exposed to domestic abuse struggle with anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and difficulty trusting others. Some may even repeat the cycle of violence in adulthood if they do not receive proper support and counseling.

Domestic violence also places a tremendous burden on communities throughout Illinois. Police officers, hospitals, shelters, courts, counselors, and social service organizations all work together to respond to domestic violence cases. Every year, thousands of survivors rely on these services to escape dangerous situations and begin rebuilding their lives. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, domestic violence agencies across Illinois provided more than 621,000 hours of direct services to over 52,000 survivors during 2025. These services included emergency shelter, counseling, legal advocacy, safety planning, and assistance finding housing and employment.

Although Illinois has invested a large amount in victim services, many survivors still face barriers when seeking help. Fear of retaliation, financial dependence, concern for their children, and emotional attachment to the abuser often prevent victims from leaving abusive situations. Others worry that they will not be believed or that reporting the abuse may make their situation even more dangerous.

For these reasons, domestic violence should not be viewed as simply a private family matter. It is a statewide issue that affects public health, public safety, education, and the well-being of entire communities. Understanding the causes and effects of domestic violence is the first step toward creating meaningful solutions that protect victims while preventing future abuse.

The Effects Of Domestic Violence in Illinois

Domestic Violence goes beyond the physical abuse survivors experience. It impacts children, extended family members, coworkers, schools, healthcare systems, and entire communities. Many victims are forced to leave their homes with no more than the clothes they are wearing. Others remain in abusive relationships because they fear retaliation, have nowhere else to go, or rely on their abuser for financial support. These situations make it extremely difficult for victims to escape, even when they know they are in danger.

Children are specifically a big concern when it comes to domestic violence, even if they are never physically harmed. Watching a parent being abused, whether it's verbal or physical, leaves emotional scars that last into adulthood. Many children experience difficulty concentrating in school, behavioral problems, depression, or anxiety. Some begin to believe violence is a normal part of relationships because it is what they witnessed growing up. Without early intervention, this cycle of abuse can continue from one generation to the next. This is why many experts believe preventing domestic violence also means protecting children from future violence. Illinois violence prevention plan emphasizes addressing trauma early, involving families, schools, and communities, and providing evidence-based support before violence escalates.

Call To Action

My call to action to help people deal with this head-on is to implement more education on domestic violence. Young people should be taught what healthy relationships look like and how to recognize the warning signs of abuse before it begins. Teaching respect, communication, and conflict resolution at an early age can help prevent future violence. Communities should also invest in domestic violence shelters, counseling, legal aid, and training for healthcare workers and educators. These resources help victims safely leave abusive relationships, while trained professionals can recognize warning signs early and connect survivors with the support they need.

Finally, every member of society has a responsibility to help end domestic violence. Friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members should take concerns seriously and encourage victims to seek help. While leaving an abusive relationship is often difficult and dangerous, having support from trusted individuals can make a significant difference. Together, Illinois can continue working toward a future where every person feels safe in their own home.

Why I Resonate

I chose this topic because domestic violence affects far more people than many realize.

Too often, victims remain silent because they fear retaliation, financial hardship, or disbelief. Learning about the issue made me realize that abuse is not always visible and that many victims continue living in dangerous situations simply because they have nowhere else to go.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home. By increasing education, improving community support, and expanding access to resources, Chicago can continue working toward reducing domestic violence and helping survivors rebuild their lives.

Conclusion

Domestic violence remains one of Chicago's most difficult public safety and public health challenges. Although overall violent crime has decreased, domestic violence continues affecting thousands of families each year. Research demonstrates that prevention, early intervention, counseling, and strong community partnerships are more effective than relying solely on criminal punishment.

Addressing domestic violence requires cooperation among law enforcement, schools, healthcare professionals, community organizations, and policymakers. When victims receive appropriate intervention, families have greater opportunity to break cycles of abuse. Chicago has made important progress, but much more work remains to ensure every resident can live free from violence.

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