

# **Domestic violence an 'epidemic' in modern world**

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Two separate studies by Group Health Cooperative in Seattle have found that by affecting 44 percent of women, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), aka domestic violence is more common and widespread than thought before, and that it not only damaging to a woman's mental health, but also her physical health.

The first study, by a team of Group Health researchers led by Robert S Thompson, MD, senior investigator, Group Health Centre for Health Studies, was conducted on a random sample of more than 3,400 women members of Group Health Cooperative.

The researchers found that nearly half - 44 per cent - reported having experienced IPV during their adult lifetime.

Robert S Thompson said that domestic violence has the proportion of an 'epidemic' but the only reason it went unreported most of the time was because of the 'stigma and shame' associated with being a battered woman.

"This is an epidemic. But it flies under the radar, because of the stigma and shame associated with it - as well as the fear that many health care providers have of opening what some call a 'Pandora's Box' of difficult problems that they are unsure how to address," he said.

They found that most abused women experienced more than one type of IPV: for example, physical IPV and verbal threats.

In addition, the severity of abuse was rated as moderately or extremely violent in 30 per cent to 60 per cent of reports, depending on the type of IPV.

"A picture emerges of both physical and non-physical IPV as very common, chronic, intergenerational, and present in highly overlapping forms," he added.

The other study, led by Amy E Bonomi, PhD, MPH, research associate, Group Health Center for Health Studies, found that the more recent a woman's IPV, and the longer it has gone on, the worse her physical and mental health and social network are likely to be.

"IPV harms women's physical and mental health even more than do other common conditions, such as back pain and even several forms of cancer," she said.

The researchers found that when compared to women with no IPV, women who had been victims of recent physical domestic violence such as slapping, hitting, kicking, or forced sex, were four times as likely to report symptoms of severe depression, as well as nearly three times as likely to report poor or fair health and more than one additional symptom.

They also reported lower social functioning by several measures.

They noted that IPV persisted for more than 20 years in 5 per cent to 13 per cent of the women.