



deeper understanding, better care.



ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

MISSION

The mission of the Academy on Violence and Abuse (AVA) is to advance health education and research on the recognition, treatment and prevention of the health effects of violence and abuse.

VISION

By expanding health education and research, AVA will integrate knowledge about violence and abuse into the training of health professionals, promote the health of all people, protect the most vulnerable, and advance health policy that promotes safe families, safe workplaces and safe communities.



Reframing society's view of violence and abuse

Violence and abuse have been viewed predominately as criminal justice or social welfare issues with a focus on stopping crime, prosecuting criminals and treating the victims' immediate physical wounds. Criminal justice systems, however, are not designed to address the full spectrum of health care needs of victims of violence and abuse. Subtle forms of violence and abuse such as verbal abuse and neglect are rarely recognized or deemed serious enough to be classified as criminal behavior. Still, these less obvious cases of abuse require prevention and contribute to serious health problems, which warrant professional treatment.

Without formal training, health care professionals often lack knowledge and understanding about the issues surrounding violence and abuse, and are inexperienced in recognizing related physical and emotional health symptoms. Instead, health problems resulting from abuse are often attributed to unrelated factors — or worse yet, to nothing at all.

For these reasons, AVA is creating dialogue, raising awareness and promoting changes in the way the issues of violence and abuse are addressed in health professional education and its academic communities.

AVA intends to enhance the infrastructure of health care education and highlight the pivotal role health care professionals play in addressing these critical issues, ultimately reframing the limited view of violence and abuse into one that establishes them as critical health care issues.



Health effects of violence and abuse

Beyond visible cuts and bruises, violence and abuse contribute to less apparent, but equally serious physical and emotional health problems. Childhood violence and abuse are shown to disrupt neurodevelopment and alter life-long brain structure and function. Further, children who endured violence and abuse are more likely to partake in high-risk behavior later in life, such as smoking, promiscuity or substance abuse. They also face an increased risk of heart disease, chronic lung disease, suicide, depression, HIV and STDs.

These facts are particularly troubling when the rates of childhood violence and abuse are considered: studies show two out of three individuals experience some form of violence and abuse during childhood. That figure has significant implications for the health care industry, such as elevation of health care costs and increased demand for health services.

Adult exposure to violence and abuse, including intimate partner violence and elder abuse, often contributes to major health issues, prompting an even greater need for health care services.

The cost of violence and abuse

Unrecognized and untreated symptoms of violence and abuse create an expensive problem for the health care system and the employers who provide insurance benefits. In fact, research indicates that abuse victims access health care services more than twice as often as individuals who never experienced abuse. Yet, this over-served and underserved population rarely receives diagnoses that identify, address or heal the underlying problems, so their health problems — and care requirements — often persist.

Incomplete and insufficient health care results in significant human and economic costs.

Health care visits, medications and therapy all contribute to rising overall health care costs. But less apparent are the larger economic implications, which include reduced productivity, work absenteeism, long-term disability and reduced profitability. Depression, for example, is one costly health problem victims of violence and abuse frequently experience. Every year, depression costs the U.S. workforce \$30 billion to \$44 billion in medical expenses, workforce absenteeism and reduced productivity.



- Two out of three individuals experience at least one form of violence or abuse during childhood
- Individuals who have experienced violence or abuse access health care more than twice as often as those who have not
- The majority of chronic pain syndrome sufferers have been victims of abuse at some point in their lives
- Individuals who experience any form of abuse during childhood are significantly more likely to develop heart disease, lung disease and other chronic health conditions

Reference materials supporting the information in this brochure are available at www.avahealth.org.

Incorporating abuse education into health care training

The need to better address health issues surrounding violence and abuse is evident. Because health care professionals are intimately involved throughout patients' lives, they have a unique opportunity to identify, address and treat the symptoms of violence and abuse in an effort to provide patients more complete care.

To accomplish this, students in health care programs need proper training on how to discuss the sensitive topic of violence and abuse and recognize its symptoms. If this training is incorporated into the infrastructure of all health care education, tomorrow's health care professionals will be better-equipped to deal with the far-reaching and significant health effects.

How you can help AVA

Become an AVA member. Apply online at www.avahealth.org.

Make a donation. Donations are vital to ensure AVA's ability to advance health education and research. For more information about how to make a donation, please visit www.avahealth.org.

Share our mission. Increased awareness regarding violence and abuse is critical. Please help us by sharing this information with your colleagues and friends.



About AVA

The Academy on Violence and Abuse (AVA) was created to address the concerns highlighted in a 2002 report released by the Institute of Medicine. The report, which challenged the health care community to better educate and train health professionals about the often unrecognizable health effects of violence and abuse, inspired a group of health care professionals to converge in effort to gain recognition and understanding for violence and abuse as health care issues.

AVA is a non-profit, academic, membership-based organization. Our membership includes a variety of health care professionals, representing various facets of the health care field. We hope to continue advancing our goal of expanding health education and research to integrate knowledge about violence and abuse into the training of all health professionals to promote safe families, safe workplaces and safe communities.



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Academy on Violence and Abuse

14850 Scenic Heights Road, Suite 135A, Eden Prairie, MN 55344

(952) 974-3270

www.avahealth.org