



Technical Assistance Guidance
November 2010



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE HOLIDAYS (REVISED 11/30/2010)

With the holiday season approaching, questions will arise about the connection between domestic violence and distinctive holidays. Guidance from the NRC DV Technical Assistance Team follows.

In response to requests from the field for statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence during the holidays, the NRC DV has not been able to find any reliable, national study linking the holidays with an increase in domestic violence, nor have we found any national data on the number of calls to shelters or to law enforcement over the holidays. Most of the available reports are anecdotal or opinion pieces where the data cited usually comes from personal experience – for example, a shelter advocate or police officer may share that they have experienced an increase in calls during the holidays in their community.

However, a 2005 study¹ exploring the incidence and characteristics of intimate partner violence (IPV) in one rural mountain state – Idaho – provides data that are relevant in responding to this timely question. As the authors indicate:

[A]lthough Idaho is not likely to be representative of larger and more urbanized states in terms of index crimes, there is little reason to believe that IPV characteristics in Idaho aren't generalizable to all states. Times of the day, the week, the month, the year, and the location of such crimes is probably fairly typical across states (Vasquez, et al., 2005, p. 100).

This study, titled *Intimate Partner Violence Incidence and Characteristics: Idaho NIBRS 1995 to 2001 Data*, analyzed seven years of [National Incident-Based Reporting System \(NIBRS\)](#) data to learn more about the incidence and characteristics of IPV in that state. NIBRS was developed in the 1980s as a means of enriching the extent and content of police report data. The Idaho study examined 36,080 police incident reports of domestic violence. Study findings indicate that:

- A greater percentage of all crime occurs at night, on the weekends, during the summer, and in one's home than at other times and places.
- Monthly incidence of reported IPV is more evident and more prevalent during the summer months, with July being the month with the highest number of reported IPV incidents.
- The first day of each month and the weekends consistently included more incidents of IPV than any other day of the month or days of the week.
- There is a strong relationship between particular holidays and incidence reports of IPV.
 - On average, Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are dates with a total number of incidents slightly below the general trend of any ordinary non-holiday.
 - New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day are dates with total domestic violence reports higher than the normal daily average.
 - In particular, on average, New Year's Day has 2.7 times more incidents of domestic violence, followed by Independence Day.

¹ Vasquez, S. P., Stohr, M. K., Purkiss, M. (2005). Intimate partner violence incidence and characteristics: Idaho NIBRS 1995 to 2001 data. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 16(1), 99-114.

As to the explanations for these findings, the study authors speculated that intimate partner violence “occurred at times when one would expect greater contact between the motivated offender and the target (e.g., at night and on the weekends).” It also occurred “in places (e.g., the home) where there was greater seclusion from other guardians² who might intercede on the victim’s behalf (e.g., extended family, friends, neighbors, strangers)... IPV was also more likely on holidays when use of alcohol likely increases and the sentiments attached to that day...do not present as much of an inhibition to the use of violence against intimates” (Vasquez, et al., 2005, p. 111).

However, the authors called for more research on the contextual realities of IPV, including why there is more of this violence during some parts of the day, week, and year, why some holidays appear to have a calming effect and others do not, and the extent to which the presence of alcohol and/or elements lead to greater levels of violence.

While the [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(NDVH\)](#) provides a very different data source than is used in the Idaho NIBRS study discussed above, it also offers information relevant to this question. The NDVH call data reflects individuals reaching out on a toll-free helpline for assistance, and includes victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders. An analysis of the calls received by the NDVH for the years 2004 through 2009, a different time period than the Idaho NIBRS study, indicates some similar and some disparate patterns:

- Nationwide, NDVH experiences a drop in call volume during the Thanksgiving holidays. Call volume during the week of Thanksgiving decreases by about 15%. Call volume on Thanksgiving Day generally drops by around 45% to 60% (see table A, pg. 3).
- Call volume is still (generally) fairly slow the week after the Thanksgiving holiday, in comparison to the average call volume (see table A, pg. 3).
- NDVH nationwide call volume during the Holiday season (December 15 to January 1) drops by about 5% to 25%. However, Inconsistent with the Idaho study findings, call volume on the actual Holidays themselves (Christmas Eve and Day, New Year’s Eve and Day) drops dramatically. The average drop in call volume on each Holiday is about 50% (see table B, pg. 3).
- Once the Holiday season is over, there is an average 5% increase in call volume over the next two weeks (see table B, pg. 3).

Because of the potential increased media and other attention to domestic violence around the holidays, it is important that advocates carefully examine and talk about the available data. Advocates and policy makers alike may be able to use this as an opportunity to discuss domestic violence and make the public aware that domestic violence does not stop during the holidays, that individuals and families cope differently with holiday related stress, and most importantly, that while the holidays may bring aggravating factors to the equation such as financial stress and alcohol consumption, battering is always an intentional behavior.

The NRCDV welcomes your input. If you are aware of additional supporting or contradictory data, please contact our Technical Assistance Team at nrcdv@pcadv.org.

² Note that in this context, the author uses the term “guardian” to mean other individuals or bystanders who are present and may mitigate the chances of violence occurring.

Table A: Thanksgiving Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2009

As indicated above, please note that NDVH call data includes victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
The Week of Thanksgiving	2270	2312	3151	3285	3487	3546
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189
The Week After	2779	2752	3596	3759	3831	4102
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189
Thanksgiving Day	146	166	239	290	332	341
	380	409	532	547	584	598

Number at the Top of the Cell = Holiday Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls

Table B: Christmas and New Year's Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2009

As indicated above, please note that NDVH call data includes victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Dec 15 to Jan 1 "The Holidays"	5660	5625	7403	8540	10094	8367
	6840	7362	9846	9846	10512	10764
Jan 2 to Jan 15	5935	5956	7563	8415	9413	7511
	5320	5726	7658	7658	8176	8372
Christmas Eve	192	184	234	370	452	304
	380	409	547	547	584	598
Christmas Day	135	160	208	270	394	258
	380	409	547	547	584	598
New Years Eve	276	243	283	523	669	422
	380	409	547	547	584	598
New Years Day	260	236	342	428	508	341
	380	409	547	547	584	598

Number at the Top of the Cell = Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls