

On October 23, 2024, the Council on Criminal Justice hosted a live webinar on domestic violence and women’s justice involvement with experts from CCJ’s [Women’s Justice Commission \(WJC\)](#) and [Crime Trends Working Group \(CTWG\)](#). Facilitated by [Stephanie Kennedy](#), CCJ policy director, the panel included:

- [Emily Salisbury](#), associate professor of social work at the University of Utah, director of the Utah Criminal Justice Center, and WJC commissioner
- [Marium Durrani](#), vice president of policy at the National Domestic Violence Hotline and WJC expert adviser
- [Alex Piquero](#), professor of sociology and criminology at the University of Miami, former director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and CTWG senior adviser

[Watch the Recording](#)

Highlights from the Conversation



Emily Salisbury



Marium Durrani



Alex Piquero

On the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Women's Justice Involvement

- **Emily Salisbury:** *“The reality is that most crimes committed by women are nonviolent drug and property crimes, and, even in these cases, domestic violence and intimate partner abuse can play a role. One of the many things that we know about girls’ and women’s pathways to offending is that the various forms of trauma and abuse that come with domestic violence and IPV oftentimes create the sort of conditions that increase women’s likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.”*
- **ES:** *“Survivors of domestic violence report having very high rates of serious mental illness, like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, as well as co-occurring*

substance use disorder. Childhood physical abuse and sexual abuse are also commonly observed among this population, as are multiple traumatic brain injuries over time. So these needs really kind of compound with how the body physiologically responds and changes to continued threat and complex trauma, which means that things like emotional regulation, self-control, and overall cognitive functioning become harder to achieve.”

- **Marium Durrani:** *“The reexamination of mandatory arrest policies is a huge area of innovation. You know, those policies had a particular design in mind and they led to a lot of unintended consequences. I say unintended consequences because there were a lot of incredible advocates who sounded the alarm of those coming problems and what dual arrests would look like when survivors and their abusive partners were both arrested.”*

On Gaps and Opportunities in Domestic Violence Data

- **Alex Piquero:** *“What we know from the National Crime Victimization Survey is that domestic violence or intimate partner violence is underreported—somewhere between 28 and 60% depending upon the way you look at underreporting. And our latest research for the Council showed that underreporting varied by demographic characteristics. So whatever is being collected at the local level that’s then being translated to the FBI for a national estimate, whatever number that is, it is certainly a floor. And the ceiling is much, much greater.”*

“Unfortunately for diagnosing the problem and then crafting evidence-informed policies, both on the prevention side and intervention side, we’re not really where we should be in 2024 with having a really good understanding of the true nature of domestic violence. And I hate saying that. I don’t want to be in a position to say that. But hopefully there’s enough rallying around agencies, not just local law enforcement but also at the federal level, about the critical importance of getting better data on this critically important problem.”

“Within the National Crime Victimization Survey, one of the great things about that data is that it actually details ... the domestic violence and the circumstances. It also asks if [the victim] ... reported, and it also asks if they sought services. And then if they didn’t report, why. Those are really foundational because if you mine that information, you can find out why victims and survivors chose not to report. And then maybe use that

information to give them the support they need to then go report.”

“The same thing is true for services. One thing that [the Bureau of Justice Statistics] released when I was the director was where victims services locations are in counties in the United States. There are some counties in the United States that have no victims service providers. I mean, it’s unconscionable that that [reality] exists today, in my view of the world. And so we need to get people to feel comfortable and safe in reporting to law enforcement [and] simultaneously get them whatever services that they are seeking to protect their public safety”

- **ES:** *“Breaking down data silos while maintaining data privacy would go a long way also to improving outcomes for women ... It can also help researchers get creative in operationalizing women’s success ... And to the point of one of our participants today, I also think there’s a massive research opportunity in bridging data from the criminal and civil legal systems –to learn more about how clients are straddling and navigating both systems at the same time, and just how crushing that can be on people.”*

“When we have public health data and criminal justice data that we can start to marry and sort of integrate and understand just the prevalence of [traumatic brain injury] among this population of both men and women, it’s pretty incredible. But there is some evidence that shows that incarcerated women have higher rates and more incidents of traumatic brain injuries in comparison to justice-involved men. It’s important to talk about with all populations, though, who are incarcerated and justice-involved ... What doesn’t get measured doesn’t get addressed and treated.”

- **MD:** *“Speaking from the National Domestic Violence Hotline, we’ve been able to do some really interesting evidence-based metrics on increased knowledge levels around safety planning, resources, and tools. So there are a lot of different ways that would work in your own community to assess maybe what survivors are looking for or what services they’re seeking, how you can connect those, what those outcomes look like. I think they’re really going to be community-specific and what survivors are willing to report, but there has been so much interesting data and research done around what you can actually use for successful metrics because evaluating domestic violence services is a huge challenge.”*

On Policy and Practice Opportunities

- **ES:** *“I think most professionals in our criminal justice systems do the best they can with*

the information that they have, and at a time when it's really challenging, quite frankly, to be in policing, courts, or corrections. And I can tell you that the movement toward gender-responsive correctional strategies for women is one of those promising things. It's no longer only adopted by a few institutional and community corrections agencies, which is good news. It has become far more prolific, and this area of inquiry has also prompted the importance of trauma-responsive care, with many agencies really beginning to consider the impact of trauma on offending, both for women and men."

- **AP:** *"We do have really good evidence on certain kinds of support services and which ones work. That's great, but we need to have them in the first place. We need to have these shelters and the hotlines and these people who are doing really good work that is happening at the community level ... they should be funded centrally from public dollars. They are critically important, just as important as any other public good in any county or state ... We need to have them and staff them well."*
- **MD:** *"The thing that I would just really want to flag is that there's a growing recognition that the traditional criminal justice responses may often do more harm than good, particularly for survivors of domestic violence. That shift toward trauma-informed, survivor-centered practices—whether it's policy reform, co-responder models, innovative justice practices like restorative practices—there have to be better ways to prioritize survivor safety and need. And I think we have to take that on as our understanding of what community safety looks like and really center survivors' voices in those solutions, because a lot of survivors who have been justice involved really have the solutions for their future and what these systems can look like."*

"My biggest soapbox ...is the need to invest in community-based prevention and intervention programs. The criminal justice system is a solution. It's not the only solution. There are proven, evidence-based ways to prevent and intervene in domestic violence situations ... like funding housing, childcare, economic resources, job training, mental health services, and substance abuse programs. Those can all help survivors address what's happening in their life and make choices for themselves to help them stay safe. To help them keep their family safe."

"Approaching domestic violence with a holistic lens, I think, is really where I would center our policymaking. It's addressing the fact that all survivors of domestic violence have different needs ... They know what they need. It's clear to me and really reiterated by the skyrocketing call volume at the hotline that the solutions we have are not working. They may be working for some people, but they're not working for everyone. So we need to do better and we need to do more."

About the Women's Justice Commission

The Women's Justice Commission is examining the unique challenges facing women in the justice system and building consensus for evidence-based policy changes that enhance safety, health, and justice.

About the Crime Trends Working Group

The mission of the Crime Trends Working Group is to explore and explain current crime trends, while building consensus for improvements in the nation's capacity to produce timely, accurate, and complete crime data.