

A Fragile Lifeline

***How Funding Threats Are Endangering
Domestic and Sexual Violence
Prevention & Response***

NO MORE

Introduction

In early 2025, the domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) sector, i.e. nonprofit organizations in the U.S. and around the world, were facing a wave of new policy changes from the U.S. federal government with implications on funding and criteria of grants they utilize to deliver services for victims/survivors of abuse as well as violence prevention programs. These changes included:

- Funding freezes
- Revised funding criteria and processes
- Significant budget cuts
- Changes to funding structures
- Potential elimination of agencies or departments that had supported the sector

The DV/SA sector has always been underfunded, with demand far outpacing the availability of resources, so these changes came in an already strained environment. NO MORE began hearing growing concern from its many U.S. and global, grassroots partners and allies about their ability to continue to administer essential programs and services.

In response, we launched a sector-wide survey in April 2025 to better understand the potential consequences of policy changes for those who rely on essential services, including survivors, their children, and loved ones; for the dedicated professionals whose livelihoods could be affected; and for the future of service delivery and the long-term capabilities to deliver trauma-informed, culturally competent, and accessible care and prevention efforts.

The following report outlines the results of the survey with the goal of spotlighting what is at stake today as the sector continues to experience instability, program disruptions, and funding uncertainty.

Background

In the U.S., many DV/SA services are reliant on federal funding streams, established by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and its subsequent renewals. These are primarily distributed through grants from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). In 2024, OVW awarded 880 grants totaling \$684 million.¹ Meanwhile, VOCA was capped at \$1.3 billion, a \$600 million reduction from the year before.² When viewed in the context of the 12 million people in the US affected by intimate partner violence each year, this investment equates to less than \$100 per survivor, an amount that barely scratches the surface of need.³ In comparison, the average lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per survivor and \$103,767 per survivor of domestic violence.⁴

Globally, funding distributed through the now dissolved U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), had also provided life-saving support for survivors around the world. The U.S. had historically been the world's largest singular aid donor, accounting for as much as 40% of humanitarian and development aid worldwide.⁵

Despite common misconceptions, philanthropy does not fill this gap; individual and foundation donations account for just 10% of total nonprofit revenue.⁶ Meanwhile, less than 2% of charitable giving in the US goes toward causes that support women and girls, and just 0.31% of that is directed towards addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG).⁷ Additionally, only 21% of foundation grants support core operational costs, making it difficult for many organizations to maintain stable staffing, infrastructure, or long-term planning. In countries around the world, funding for nonprofit and community services can be even less reliable.

The result of these conditions is an essential sector expected to meet rising demand with declining support—a model that is not only unsustainable, but dangerous.

To understand the scale of the current moment, consider that globally, 1 in 3 women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. On a single day last year, domestic violence programs in the U.S. provided emergency shelter to over 50,000 individuals, including survivors and their children, in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and similar programs. They also answered over 26,000 hotline calls and messages and delivered educational programming to nearly 16,500 people. Yet, on that same day, over 14,000 victim-survivors were turned away because programs lacked sufficient resources, funding, or staffing to meet their needs.⁸ Meanwhile, the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network's (RAINN) victim service programs alone assist an average of 27,000 survivors each month.⁹

In addition to emergency resources, survivors rely on a broader infrastructure of economic security programs; 67% of survivors report returning to or remaining in an abusive relationship because they couldn't afford to leave and up to 60% of women who experience domestic violence participate in economic security programs.¹⁰

If these services are neglected, thousands of survivors in the U.S. and countless more around the world may be at increased risk.

Methodology

We used a mixed-method approach to collect insights from across the DV/SA sector. Throughout the month of April, we surveyed 130 organizations from around the world, covering six continents and 35 countries. 75 of these organizations were based in the U.S. and 55 were international. After closing the survey at the beginning of May, we invited willing respondents to participate in semi-structured interviews to provide deeper insight into the challenges organizations could be facing on the ground and the real-world impacts behind the numbers.

Please note that the survey was conducted prior to the formal shutdown of USAID.

Key Findings

**Note: prior to USAID being formally shut down.*

Funding instability has escalated across the sector.

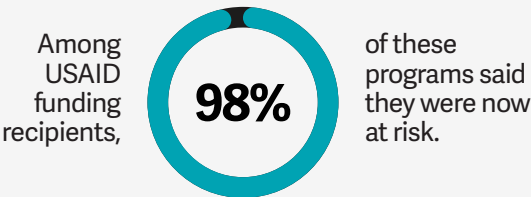


Service disruptions are already widespread.



Core programs are experiencing high strain.

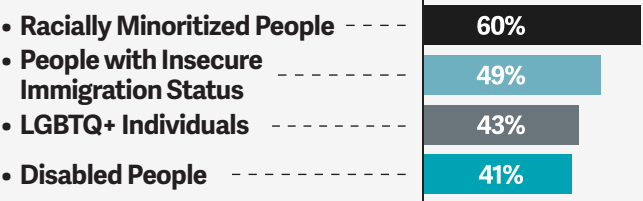
In the U.S., the programs most vulnerable to disruptions included:



Service losses will disproportionately impact vulnerable groups.

Women and children will be most affected by service disruptions, with **81% of organizations reporting women and 61% reporting children as being at high risk.**

Organizations in the U.S. also reported high risk for:



*Where % indicates organizations reporting that these populations will be heavily affected by disruptions to their services.

Loss of expertise is projected to be widespread.



Among U.S. respondents, an estimated **1,186 cumulative years of staff experience is at risk.** Projected nationally, more than **45,000 years of experience in the sector could be lost in 2025.**

Results

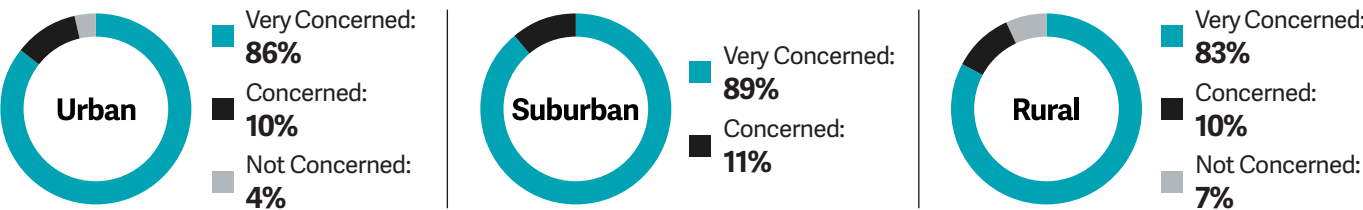
Services at Risk

Our findings reveal a crisis of instability threatening the sustainability of vital services worldwide. Globally, organizations dependent on government funding, including federal/state streams in the U.S. and USAID funding internationally, said that they are now in jeopardy.

Organizations Around the World Are Experiencing Heightened Insecurity

In the U.S., 87% of surveyed organizations reported that they rely on state or federal funding, with an overwhelming 97% expressing concern about the continuity of these funds. 86% reported urgent concern, underscoring the magnitude of the current threat.

These levels of concern were consistent across all geographic categories:



“
If we lose
this money,
we’re done.”

Two leaders of an organization based in New Jersey, funded primarily through federal VOCA and VAWA grants, told us that after experiencing a 30% cut to their funding last year, they were now preparing for an additional 40% reduction. When we spoke in late May 2025, their team was still waiting to receive the application to renew their VAWA grant, for the cycle scheduled to begin on July 1st—funding that they said they could not afford to lose. Now, toward the end of July, they still haven’t received information on the status of these funding streams.

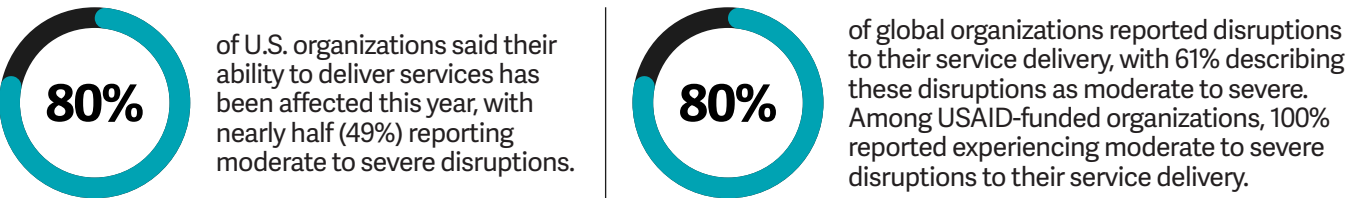
Bracing for possible cuts, they reported that their team’s salaries have been frozen, leadership is working full time for part-time pay, and they have given up their physical office space. They were also considering launching a GoFundMe to raise the money needed to stay open should their federal funding fall through.

This sector-wide vulnerability is also reflected in the responses of international participants, particularly among organizations that had been reliant on USAID funding. Every USAID-funded organization we surveyed expressed concern about the status of their funding, and 90% urgently so.

These trends underscore the precarity facing GBV organizations today. Funding uncertainty makes it harder for organizations to retain staff, deliver services, and sustain long-term programming. As these disruptions grow, essential services hang in the balance.

Service Disruptions Are Already Widespread

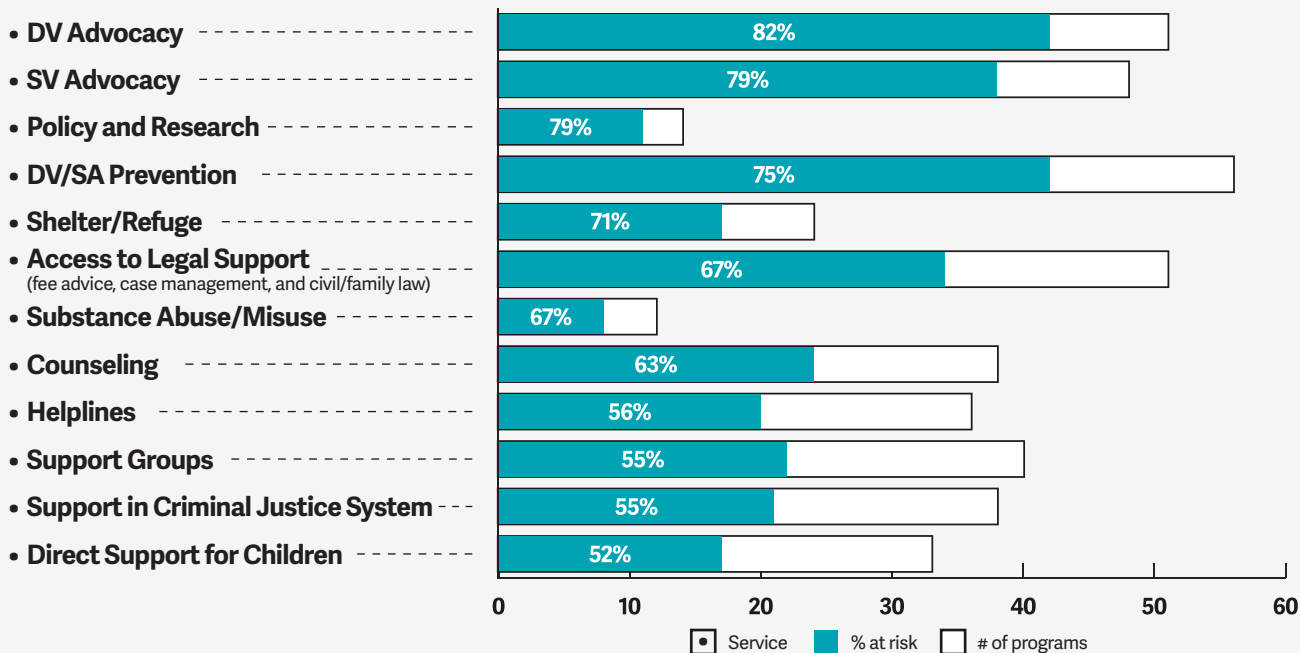
The data shows the concerns of organizations are not abstract, as their service delivery had already begun to experience disruptions:



Essential Programs Are in Jeopardy

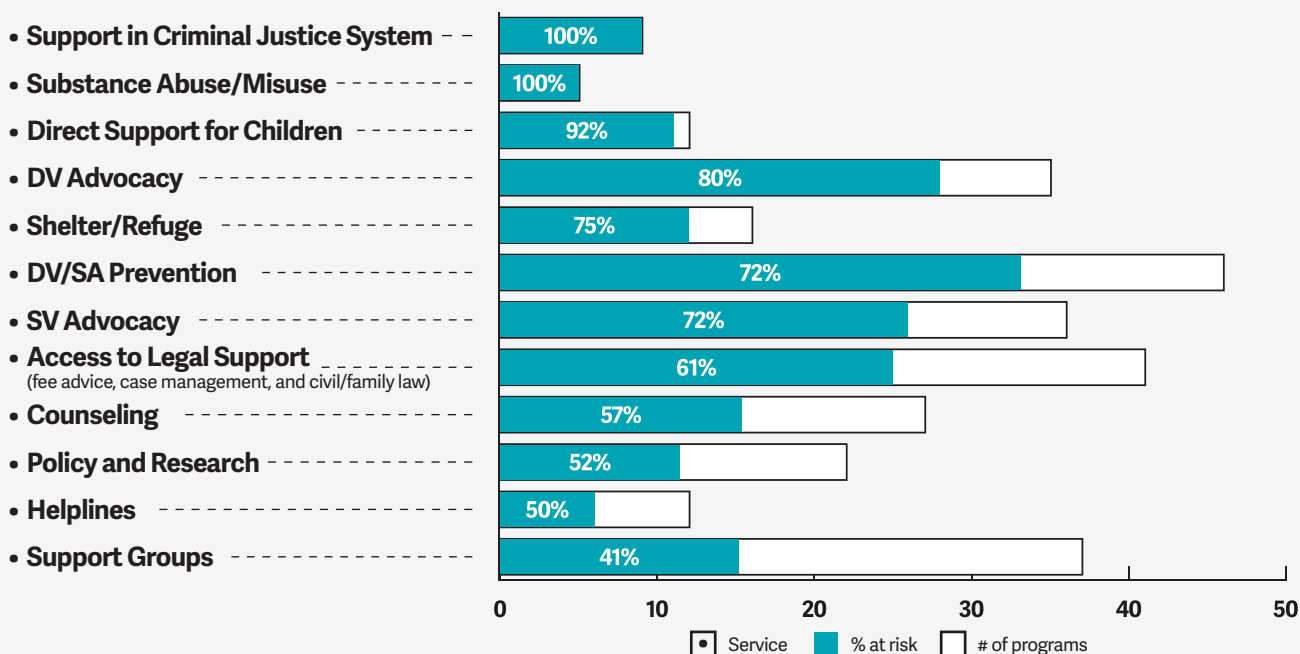
We asked organizations which services they currently provide and which are at greatest risk due to funding cuts or policy changes, including those targeting “DEI” or culturally-specific services. The results indicate high instability across programs:

Risk Proportions - US Federally Funded



The situation seems to be even more severe among international organizations, especially those previously supported by USAID. These organizations now face heightened competition for a shrinking pool of resources, accelerating an already critical funding crisis.

Risk Proportions - International



Compared to the United States, the scope and availability of GBV services internationally tends to be more limited, with fewer programs offering the same breadth of functions or infrastructure. This will likely make the loss of services even more devastating to affected communities, as these few existing resources are often the only support options available.

Survivors at Risk

Organizations Say Vulnerable Groups Will Be Most Affected

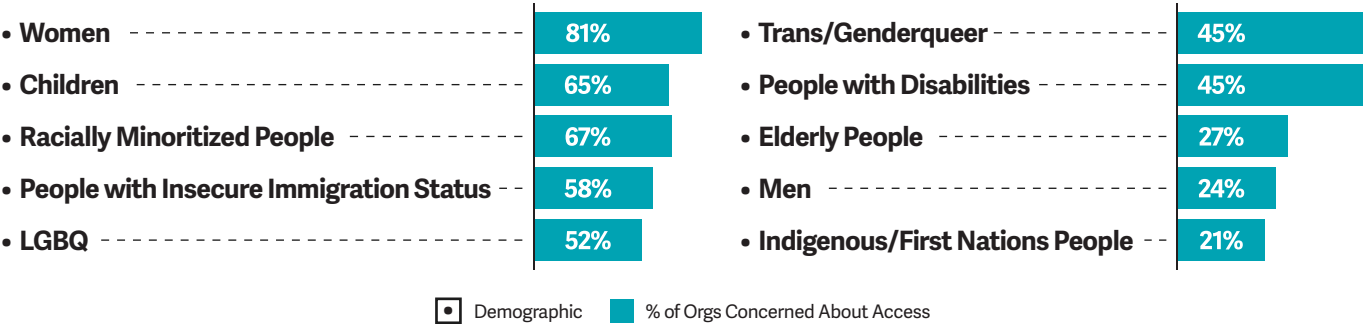
Our findings project that service cuts will not fall evenly. Rather, organizations expect that they will compound existing structural inequalities, further marginalizing survivors who already face barriers to support. The intersectional nature of GBV means that people affected by economic or social injustice—including poverty, racial, sexual, or gender discrimination, ableism, and/or insecure immigration status—often experience the most difficulty in accessing support, and are therefore most vulnerable when systems fail.

“We’re pushing forward. I don’t want to operate from a fear mindset.”

The CEO of an organization in Portland, Oregon told us that the recent removal of sanctuary protections for shelters has created real concern about the possibility of ICE showing up at her shelter. She did not mince her words: if anyone comes looking for one of her residents, her staff has been trained to deny access without exception. She said that if it comes to it, she is prepared to be arrested and has even set up a plan with two other shelter leaders to ensure continuity in the event of legal action.

Although there is some concern that fear of deportation or detention will deter people from seeking help, she said that her organization is committed to continue delivering safe, accessible services for all.

Across all U.S. organizations surveyed, the groups most often identified as at risk include:



“We’re a minority-majority team. It’s hard because these are their communities.”

We spoke with the CEO of a shelter in a southern state, where more than 30% of clients in 2024 were undocumented, a group now facing heightened risk amid increased immigration enforcement. To help protect these families, she said that her organization is helping more clients with guardianship orders, to ensure that if a parent is detained by ICE, their children can remain in safe, stable care rather than risk being returned to an abusive situation. Internally, she reported that staff have been instructed not to collect information about immigration status; clients are connected to in-house counsel so that their communications can fall under attorney-client privilege; and all record-keeping practices that could endanger clients have been suspended, despite the loss of valuable data for future needs assessments.

She said that her staff now carries the dual burden of supporting vulnerable clients while navigating the same fears and challenges in their own lives, adding to both emotional and operational strain.

Unlike the United States and other high-income countries, where some level of specialized support infrastructure exists — even if access remains unequal — communities in many developing nations, including those that had previously been in receipt of USAID funding, often rely entirely on a small number of organizations that serve as the crux of available services for survivors. Many of the organizations we surveyed served multiple purposes in their communities, including women’s empowerment, community development, child protection, reproductive healthcare, education, and economic or political rights initiatives.

When these organizations lose funding or are forced to scale back, the fear is that in addition to jeopardizing one of the only points of access for DV/SA support, it could also dismantle other critical infrastructure that underpins health, economic development, education, and stability across the entire community.

Staff at Risk

Service providers are experiencing high strain.

Our survey results showed that strained service providers have become even more strained in the current climate. Among all organizations surveyed:



“
**A lot of my
colleagues have left.
We’re working 80-90
hour weeks.”**

An advocate based in Ohio described the immense burnout that she and her colleagues have been facing. Many have already left under the strain of 80-90 hour work weeks, and she admitted she had considered doing the same. Her own workload includes working full-time across two organizations; in addition, she volunteers 30 hours a week as a hospital advocate for sexual assault survivors, which puts her on call during evenings and weekends. She told us while she’s committed to being there for survivors in their time of need, she was feeling the weight of her work encountering trauma daily.

The sector is facing widespread loss of experience.

Most organizations also indicated their staff are experiencing insecurity in their roles for the year ahead:



Several organizations reported losing staff members with more than 30 to 50 years of experience in the field. One organization alone reported that over 100 cumulative years of staff expertise is now at risk this year.

Based on reported experience data, NO MORE estimates that at least 1,186 years of cumulative experience are at risk this year among the U.S.-based organizations surveyed—a conservative figure based on midpoints from reported ranges. Extrapolated to the national level, if similar trends hold across the 2,850 domestic violence shelters in the U.S., the field is facing a loss of approximately 45,068 years of experience in 2025.

Internationally, survey respondents reported a cumulative projected loss of experience at 425 years in 2025. Across the global sector, the loss is incalculable.

These numbers represent more than workforce attrition. They represent the disappearance of institutional memory, survivor trust, trauma-informed care practices, and culturally-responsive expertise that cannot be replaced with short-term staffing solutions.

Conclusion

The survey findings make it clear that our sector is facing a period of increasing instability as essential services are being scaled or cut back, frontline staff are overextended, and marginalized survivors lose access to responsive support. For many organizations, particularly those (currently or previously) reliant on U.S. federal or USAID funding, the threat is existential, jeopardizing the safety and recovery of millions of survivors worldwide.

In order to ensure that services for survivors and violence prevention programs are no longer uncertain nor endangered, below is a set of recommended next steps, which many in our sector are actively advocating for today.

1. Protect and Increase Core Funding for Domestic and Sexual Violence Services

The most obvious immediate goal is for federal funding streams and international development aid to be restored or maintained, with federal, state, and local governments prioritizing stable, multi-year funding streams for core services, including emergency shelter, legal advocacy, counseling, and prevention programming. Longer-term, governments, in partnership with our sector, must continue to identify and introduce new sources of flexible, unrestricted funding in order to better meet demand and invest in prevention strategies.

2. Recognize and Support the Workforce Behind the Work

Funders should invest in the sustainability of the sector's workforce by supporting living wages, benefits, mental health care, and professional development. Grant criteria should allow for adequate staffing and retention efforts, especially in high-demand rural and marginalized communities.

3. Center the Voices of Survivors and Frontline Providers in Policy and Practice

Survivors and frontline workers hold the deepest knowledge about what is needed for meaningful safety and healing. Their experiences must be consistently incorporated into decision-making at all levels, from funding priorities to program design to legislative advocacy.

4. Ensure Culturally Specific and Inclusive Services are Fully Funded and Protected

Programs led by and for communities of color, LGBTQ+ survivors, undocumented individuals, and other marginalized groups must receive targeted investment. These organizations provide culturally relevant care that cannot be replaced, and should not be penalized by politicized funding restrictions.

5. Reduce Administrative Burdens in Federal Grantmaking

Simplify and standardize federal grant applications, renewals, and reporting requirements to ensure that small and mid-sized organizations, especially those led by survivors and BIPOC leaders, can access and sustain funding without being overburdened.

6. Fund Prevention, Not Just Crisis Response

Violence is preventable. Long-term investment in school-based programs, public awareness campaigns, and community education—especially those that target youth, first responders, and caregivers—must be scaled alongside crisis services.

The landscape has been evolving since NO MORE conducted the survey. There are legal challenges, additional policy changes, and federal funding decisions pending. We will continue to track the developments, monitor their impacts, and share insights to ensure that the voices of providers, advocates, and survivors remain central to the conversation.

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