

Domestic Abuse Myths and Facts

When it comes to domestic violence, it can be difficult to separate fact from myth. Because each victim's situation is unique, the solution to one person's circumstances may put another victim at greater risk. Well-meaning friends and family members may have misconceptions that can confuse or make a situation more dangerous. Whether you are the victim or know someone who is being abused, it is important to be able to distinguish myth from fact to make important decisions about personal safety.

Myth #1: The Victim Could Leave

Fact: This may be the biggest myth about domestic violence. Often there are no safe ways for the victim to escape. The most dangerous part of the abuse cycle often occurs when the victim tries to leave. Many abusers become more violent when they suspect that their control over their victim is threatened. If the abuser suspects the victim is leaving or is able to find out where the victim has gone, the victim can be at great risk.

When children are involved, the victim may be enduring the attacks to protect them from the abuser. Some victims feel their children are better off having contact with their parent, even if the price is violence directed at the victim. Abusers commonly control every aspect of their victims' lives, cutting them off from resources and people to help them leave.

Additionally, battered person's syndrome, a mindset that can develop after prolonged domestic violence, can make it extremely difficult for victims to make independent decisions.

Myth #2: Abuse Happens Only to Certain People

Fact: Domestic violence knows no racial, sexual, financial or class boundaries. An abuser can be a lawyer, doctor or factory worker. Though not occurring with the same frequency, female spouses or partners can abuse men as well. According to the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, 85 percent of all domestic violence cases named a woman as the victim, leaving the other 15 percent of victims as men.

Myth #3: Domestic Violence is Rare

Fact: Domestic violence affects a staggering number of people. According to the FBI, women between the ages of 15 and 44 sustain more injuries from domestic abuse than from car accidents, rape and muggings combined.

Myth #4: Domestic Violence is Caused by Substance Abuse

Fact: Though drugs and alcohol can play a role, these substances are not the cause of domestic abuse. Abuse has more to do with an abuser's need to have absolute control over the victim. However, drugs and alcohol may heighten the frequency or intensity of the abuse, making the perpetrator more impulsive and less inhibited. Treatment for substance abuse is not a guarantee that he or she will no longer be an abuser. Promises from an abuser to quit drinking are also no guarantee of safety.

Myth #5: Marital Therapy Should Be Sought in Abusive Relationships

Fact: Marital therapy in which both the husband and wife see a therapist together can make the situation even more dangerous. Discussing problems in an open and honest dialogue in front of a third party can create a more violent situation at home for the victim. Both the victim and the abuser need therapy, but should be treated separately. The victim's safety should be the first priority.

Myth #6: Personality Dictates the Victim

Fact: It can be dangerous to assume that abuse only happens to some people. The personality of the victim does not determine whether he or she will be abused. An abuser inflicts harm to assert his or her total authority over the victim and the relationship. Anyone can become a victim at the hands of a spouse or partner. In fact, abusers are

very often charming and charismatic in the beginning of a relationship.

Myth #7: The Abuse May Not Be Repeated

Fact: Part of the cycle of abuse includes a period in which the abuser may apologize for his or her actions and promise to change. The abuser may feel sorry about what he or she did and even cry and beg the victim not to leave after a violent act. The abuser may shower the victim with gifts and compliments. This can be confusing to the victim and may lead him or her to think the abuse will not happen again. By staying in the relationship, the victim will continue to be at risk.

If you are a victim of abuse or know a family member or friend who is being abused, your employee-assistance program (EAP) can help with more information about what to do. You also can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or the TTY number at (800) 787-3224. In the event of an emergency, calling the police, 911 or your local emergency number are the best options.

Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline: www.thehotline.org

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: www.ncadv.org

Domesticviolence.org: www.domesticviolence.org

Family Violence Prevention Fund: <http://endabuse.org>

Men Against Sexual Violence (MASV): <http://www.pcar.org/men-against-sexual-violence-masv>

National Center for Victims of Crime: www.ncvc.org

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