

Myths and Facts about Domestic Violence

Myth Domestic violence is a private family matter.

Fact Domestic violence is everyone's business. Keeping domestic violence secret helps no one, has been shown to harm children, incurs substantial costs to society, and serves to perpetuate abuse through learned patterns of behavior.

Myth Most of the time, domestic violence is not really that serious.

Fact Domestic violence is an illegal act in the U.S. and is considered a crime with serious repercussions. Although there are aspects of domestic violence (e.g., emotional, psychological, spiritual abuse) that may not be considered criminal in a legal sense, serious and long-lasting physical, emotional and spiritual harm can, and often does, occur. Each and every act of domestic violence needs to be taken seriously.

Myth Victims provoke their partners' violence.

Fact Whatever problems exist in a relationship, the use of violence is never justifiable or acceptable. There is NO EXCUSE for domestic violence.

Myth Domestic violence is an impulse control or anger management problem.

Fact Abusers act deliberately and with forethought. Abusers choose whom to abuse. For example, an abuser will selectively batter his wife but not his boss.

Myth No one would beat his pregnant wife or girlfriend.

Fact Domestic violence may begin or escalate during pregnancy. Homicide is the single most frequent cause of maternal death during pregnancy and in the first year after giving birth.

Myth Women are just as violent as men in relationships.

Fact Some women report striking their male partners during the course of conflict, often in self-defense. Women, however, rarely commit deliberate acts that result in fear, injury, rape, or death.

Myth Domestic violence is bad but it happens elsewhere. It doesn't happen in my community, my neighborhood, my culture, my religion, or my congregation.

Fact Domestic violence happens to people of every educational and socioeconomic level. Domestic violence happens in all races, religions, and age groups. Domestic violence occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

Myth It is easy for a victim to leave her abuser, so if she doesn't leave, it means she likes the abuse or is exaggerating how bad it is.

Fact Fear, lack of safe options, and inability to survive economically prevent many women from leaving abusive relationships. Threats of harm, including death to the victim and/ or children, keep many battered women trapped in abusive situations. The most dangerous time for a battered woman is when she attempts to leave the relationship, or when the abuser discovers that she has made plans to leave.

Myth Children are generally neither aware of, nor affected by, their mother's abuse.

Fact Fear, Nearly 90% of children who live in homes in which there is domestic violence will see or hear the abuse. Children as young as toddlers can suffer from the effects of exposure to abuse. Children exposed to violence and other forms of trauma may have permanent alterations in brain structure, chemistry, and function.

Myth Domestic violence can occur in older women, but it is quite rare.

Fact Approximately half of all elder abuse in women is thought to be domestic violence "grown old". Older battered women are less likely to seek and receive help.

Myth Anger management programs are briefer, more cost effective than, and just as successful as certified batterer intervention programs.

Fact Although briefer and less expensive than certified batterer intervention programs, anger management programs are not effective to address the deep-rooted issues of batterers.

Myth Since domestic violence is a problem in the relationship, marriage or couple-focused pastoral counseling is key to restoring tranquility in the family or relationship.

Fact This type of counseling often increases the risk of violence to the victim. Faith and religious community representatives can promote safety and restore personal integrity and self-esteem to the victim, and can suggest batterer intervention services for the abuser, but should not engage in couples counseling unless the long-term safety of the survivor, and of staff, can be assured.

Myth Services for victims are staffed by people angry at traditional society who want to break up the family unit.

Fact Programs that help battered women and their children, and counselors who provide assistance, are concerned first and foremost with the safety of the survivor and her dependent children. The goal of counseling and other survivor services is not to break up the family unit but to preserve the safety of all its members. Achieving this goal, unfortunately, may mean that some relationships may need to end.

Myth Since our religion doesn't condone divorce, an abusive man should speak with the religious leader to mend his ways.

Fact Although some religions do frown on divorce, no religion advocates abuse. Some abusers misinterpret or intentionally misuse religious writing to justify violence against their partners and children or to prevent marriage – even one wracked by violence and abuse – from dissolving. Helpful conversations with a batterer, even if conducted carefully by a religious leader, may bring short-term relief, but cannot take the place of qualified batterer intervention services, and may even pose a safety risk for the victim and her children.

– Alpert, Elaine J. (2005). Responding to Domestic Violence: An Interfaith Guide to Prevention and Intervention. The Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network. Retrieved August 3, 2009. Website: www.batteredwomensnetwork.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/cmbwn_booklet.pdf