

# Domestic Abuse: Myths and Facts

## MYTH #1:

### **“Domestic abuse only happens in certain types of problem families.”**

Domestic abuse happens in families of every class and culture. It happens in families with children and without, in first marriages, second marriages, and arranged marriages, between unmarried partners living together or living at separate homes. It also happens once the relationship has ended.

It happens in both heterosexual and same sex relationships. It happens to council tenants, people who own their own homes, professionals and people in authority, the working class and unemployed people. It is no higher in one particular type of relationship or family, than another.

Abusive relationships happen in every ethnic, cultural, national and social section. Highly intelligent specialists are just as likely to abuse their partners as are skilled and unskilled manual workers. Financially independent people are just as likely to be abused/abusers as are people on lower incomes.

Abusers who commit acts of domestic abuse do so in order to control another. The constant, need to control people and situations is often not shown to work colleagues and friends. Their mistaken belief that they have the right to control their partners or family members is usually only demonstrated in front of those closest to them.

## MYTH #2:

### **“Domestic abuse happens equally to men and women.”**

Men and women may experience incidents of domestic abuse. The majority of the victims of domestic violence are women and children; women are twice as likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, including sexual violence. They are also more likely to have experienced sustained physical, psychological or emotional abuse, or violence which results in injury or death.

Controlling and abusive behaviour can happen equally in same sex relationships. Domestic abuse is not acceptable in any form and should not be suffered whether the victim is male or female. Everyone has the undeniable right to live a life free from intimidation and fear of violence. Due to the gendered division between abuser and victim, support services for victims, are best provided separately for women and for men to ensure the safety of service users. There are separate women's and men's advice lines for these reasons.

## MYTH #3

### **“A woman would never stay with a man who was abusing her.”**

Emotional abuse happens over a sustained period of time, where there is a pattern that the abuser insists on intimidating, frightening or using coercion to control their victim and there is an ongoing sense of fear of their abusers reaction. Women and men stay in abusive relationships for lots of reasons from love to terror. It must be highlighted that domestic abuse is a cycle. Non-physical, emotionally abusive behaviour and attitudes are intentionally used by the abuser to control without remorse, as the clear intention is to dominate and impose unreasonable and often sustained control over another.

The victim may be afraid for their own or their children's safety or that the abuse will increase, if they try to leave or get help. They may be worried about not having money to support themselves and

their children if they leave. They may be worried about losing their home or possessions and worry that their children may be taken away from them if they're not financially secure. They may be afraid of being alone, especially if they have to move away from friends and family. There may be feelings of guilt or shame which prevent them from leaving. They may have few friends or family and feel they have nowhere to go. They may not want to move the children away from their school. For the victim there are many emotional, social and financial obstacles to tackle before they can find the strength to leave. Repeated undermining of the victims self-esteem can leave him/her with very little confidence, socially isolated, and without the normal decision-making abilities.

Nobody should be beaten or abused. Victims often have to try and pacify their abusers to prevent them flying into a rage and avoid another incident. Leaving or trying to leave is the most dangerous time for a victim. The abuser will often increase the violence or abuse, and can put both the victim and any children in a position of fearing for their lives. Leaving is the ultimate threat to the abusers power and control, and he/she will often do anything rather than let go.

The abuser chooses who and when to abuse. They are responsible for their own moods. If they've had a bad day at work, they don't take out their frustrations on their boss, or even their work colleagues. They take it out on those at home, the one's they're supposed to love. Only the abuser can be held responsible for his/her own actions.

## MYTH #4

### **“It's only drunks who are violent to their partners.”**

Domestic abuse cannot be blamed on alcohol. Some abusers may have been drinking when they are abusive, but alcohol is not an excuse. Some abusers do not drink. There is no one particular type of person who abuses. Abusers are selfish and self-centred, often only seeing things from their own point of view, disregarding their partners and family's needs.

A lot of research is going into the link between drug or alcohol use and violence. Although some abusers are more likely to be abusive when drunk, many more abuse when totally sober. Alcohol and drugs may increase the likeliness of violence occurring, they do not in fact cause it. Alcohol and drug abuse are separate issues from the domestic abuse, though they overlap. Blaming drug or alcohol dependency for abuse is missing the point completely. The abuser is responsible for their actions regardless of their addictions.

## MYTH #5

### **“Domestic abuse between adults does not affect the children”**

The majority of children witness the violence that is occurring, and in 90% of cases they are in the same or next room. Children can 'witness' domestic violence in a many different ways. For example, they may get caught in the middle of an incident in an effort to make the violence stop. They may be in the room next door and hear the abuse or see their mother's physical injuries following an incident of violence. In 40 – 70% of cases where women are being abused, the children are also being directly abused themselves. All children witnessing domestic violence are being emotionally abused.

Witnessing domestic abuse is really distressing and scary for a child, and causes serious harm. Children living in a home where domestic abuse is happening are at risk of other types of abuse too. Children can experience domestic abuse or violence in lots of different ways. They might: see the abuse, hear the abuse from another room, see a parent's injuries or distress afterwards or be hurt by being nearby or trying to stop the abuse.

Teenagers can also experience domestic abuse. Domestic abuse can happen in any relationship, and it affects young people too. They may not realise that what's happening is abuse. Even if they do, they might not tell anyone about it because they're scared of what will happen, or ashamed about what people will think.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – THE FACTS**

**8.2% of women and 4% of men were estimated to have experienced domestic abuse in 2014/15, equivalent to an estimated 1.3 million female and 600,000 male victims. (Office for National Statistics 2014/15 (ONS).**

27.1% of women and 13.2% of men had experienced any domestic abuse since the age of 16. These figures were equivalent to an estimated 4.5 million female victims of domestic abuse and 2.2 million male victims between the ages of 16 and 59 (ONS)

**2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner (Office of National Statistics, 2015) – 1 woman killed every 3 days**

1 in 4 women in England and Wales will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes and 8% will suffer domestic violence in any given year (CSEW, 2013/14)

**Globally, 1 in 3 women will experience violence at the hands of a male partner (State of the World's Fathers Report, MenCare, 2015)**

Domestic violence has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime (Home Office, July 2002)

**Every minute police in the UK receive a domestic assistance call – yet only 35% of domestic violence incidents are reported to the police (Stanko, 2000 & Home Office, 2002)**

On average, a woman is assaulted 35 times before her first call to the police (Jaffe, 1982)

## **CHILDREN**

**Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse. Radford, L. et al (2011)**

Domestic abuse is a factor in over half of serious case review. Sidebotham, P. et al (2016)

**1 in 5 teenagers have been physically abused by their boyfriends or girlfriends. Barter et al (2009)**

62% of children in households where domestic violence is happening are also directly harmed (SafeLives, 2015)

**In 90% of domestic violence incidents in family households, children were in the same or the next room (Hughes, 1992)**

## **HEALTH**

**30% of domestic violence either starts or will intensify during pregnancy (Department of Health report, October 2004)**

Foetal morbidity from violence is more prevalent than gestational diabetes or pre-eclampsia (Friend, 1998)

## **COST TO SOCIETY**

**In November 2009, Sylvia Walby of the University of Leeds estimated the total costs of domestic violence to be £15.7 billion a year.**

The costs to services (Criminal Justice System, health, social services, housing, civil legal) amount to £3.8 billion per year

**The loss to the economy – where women take time off work due to injuries – is £1.9 billion per year**