

Domestic Violence Series (Part 2)

II. Domestic Violence Myths and Realities

MYTH: The problem of domestic violence is greatly exaggerated.

REALITY: Every nine seconds in the United States, a woman is battered. Battering has been cited as the greatest single cause of injury among women in the United States.

MYTH: Men and women have always fought; it is natural.

REALITY: All couples will disagree at one time or another. But it is important to remember that anger is a feeling while violence is a behavior. It is possible to be angry without becoming violent. Battering is a crime of power and control.

MYTH: Domestic violence only happens in the lower economic classes and minority populations.

REALITY: Domestic abuse of women occurs in families from all social, racial, economic, educational and religious backgrounds. It occurs in towns, suburbs, rural areas and inner cities.

MYTH: Pregnancy will protect a woman from battering.

REALITY: Pregnant women are battered at rates of 15-20%. There is no subgroup of women immune to the threat of domestic violence.

MYTH: If a woman wanted to, she could leave her abuser.

REALITY: We've all heard that a man's home is his castle, but that same home may be a prison for a woman. The barriers to escape may be invisible, but they are extremely powerful. Women stay in abusive relationships for many reasons:

- She loves him and values his good qualities.
- She is economically dependent on him.
- Because he has destroyed her other relationships, she has no other emotional support.
- Fear of failure. Our culture has put the burden of a successful marriage on the woman.
- Religious beliefs about marriage.
- Not wanting to deprive the children of their father.
- He tells her each incident will be the last one.
- Fear of more violence

MYTH: Domestic violence does not affect the children since they are not usually aware of the abuse.

REALITY: Interviews with children of battered women reveal that they have seen, heard, and can describe detailed accounts of violence that their mother or father never realized they had witnessed. Children also witness the consequences of the abuse after it has occurred. Symptoms experienced by children who have witnessed domestic violence include:

- Sleep disorders
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Depression
- Isolation from friends
- Bedwetting
- Truancy
- Learning problems
- In addition, an estimated 40% to 50% of men who abuse women also abuse children.

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Domestic Violence - Myths and Realities Continued:

MYTH: Battered women are masochistic and crazy; they provoke and enjoy the abuse.

REALITY: Our society's willingness to blame the battered woman for her abuser's behavior by looking for flaws in her personality or moral character is taking the easy way out. In studies of women who are battered in their intimate relationships, researchers have found no evidence of serious psychological problems before entering the abusive relationship. It's impossible to understand the batterer by researching the character of the victim.

MYTH: Marital rape does not really happen.

REALITY: Surveys have revealed that from 20% to 37% of women who have been battered by their husbands were also raped by their husbands.

MYTH: Men who abuse women are mentally ill and not responsible for their actions.

REALITY: Battering is a complex behavior that stems from individual psychology and male socialization, but in the vast majority of instances, it is not a result of mental illness. Batterers are not out of control. They use violence as a way to gain and maintain control over their partner and the relationship. Domestic battering is a crime, and as with all other crimes, the batterer is responsible for his or her behavior and its consequences.

MYTH: Alcohol and drug use cause domestic violence.

REALITY: There is little scientific evidence to support the theory that alcohol and drugs directly produce violent and abusive behaviors. There is no evidence to suggest that alcohol treatment, by itself, will be effective in changing abusive behavior. It should be noted that many men who batter report no history of addiction or misuse of alcohol or other substances. Likewise, only a portion of those individuals addicted to or misusing substances also batter.

MYTH: Batterers cannot change.

REALITY: Batterers can, and do change. When a batterer is motivated, treatment groups can facilitate good outcomes. Abusive behavior, however, is self-rewarding; the batterer is rewarded for violent behavior by feelings of power and control or by the immediate gratification of a personal desire. Motivation to change often comes only after being held accountable by the criminal justice system. The challenge for successful treatment is helping the batterer recognize and accept responsibility for abusive behavior, and finding personal motivation for long-term behavioral change.

MYTH: Once the violence stops, everything will be okay.

REALITY: Stopping the physical violence may not make the relationship a healthy one. If threats and manipulation replace violence as a control technique, there may be little change in the battered woman's emotional environment and daily life. Chronic abuse can cause serious psychological harm. Even after escaping the abusive relationship, many women experience a long-term inability to trust and alterations in sense of identity.

MYTH: Domestic violence is only a family problem.

REALITY: The effects of domestic violence extend far beyond the family. When factors such as medical costs, absenteeism, lost wages, court costs, pain, suffering and lost quality of life are considered, it is important that domestic violence be treated as a significant social problem.

References for this section: http://www.computerbob.com/abuse/dv_myths_and_realities.php
http://www.gacircleofhope.org/myths_realities.htm

Next section posted will be "Domestic Violence Series (Part 2) – "Explanation of Domestic Violence and Abuse" (Part 2A) on Tuesday, June 5th.