

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

MYTH: Battering is rare.

FACT: Battering is extremely common. The F.B.I. estimates that a woman is battered every fifteen seconds in the United States.

MYTH: Domestic violence occurs only in poor, poorly educated, minority or “dysfunctional” families. It could never happen to anyone I know.

FACT: There are doctors, ministers, psychologists, cops, attorneys, judges, and other professionals who batter their wives. Battering happens in rich, white, educated, and respectable families. About half of the couples in this country experience violence at some point in their relationship.

MYTH: Battering is about couples getting into a brawl on Saturday night beating each other up, and totally disrupting the neighborhood.

FACT: In domestic assaults, one partner is beating, intimidating, and terrorizing the other. It’s not “mutual combat” or two people in a fist fight. It’s one person dominating and controlling the other.

MYTH: The problem is not really woman abuse. It is spouse abuse. Women are just as violent as men.

FACT: In approximately 90% of domestic assaults, the man is the perpetrator. This fact makes many of us uncomfortable, but it is no less true because of that discomfort. To end domestic violence, we must scrutinize why it is usually men who are violent in partnerships. We must examine the historic and legal permission that men have been given to be violent in general, and to be violent towards their wives and children specifically. There are rare cases where a woman batters a man. Battering does occur in lesbian and gay male relationships. Survivors of abuse in such relationships should hear this because their situation is rare — or because they are in a socially unacceptable relationship — that does not make it less valid or serious. The National Domestic Violence Hotline believes that violence is unacceptable in intimate relationships and provides services to any person who has been victimized.

Turning Point Counseling

Visit us at TurningPointCounseling.org ♦ Or call us at (800) 998-6329



MYTH: When there is violence in the family, all members of the family are participating in the dynamic, and therefore all must change for the violence to stop.

FACT: Only the perpetrator has the ability to stop the violence. Battering is a behavioral choice. Many women who are battered make numerous attempts to change their behavior in the hope that this will stop the abuse. This does not work. Changes in family members' behavior will not cause or influence the batterer to be non-violent!

MYTH: Domestic violence is usually a onetime event, an isolated incident.

FACT: Battering is a pattern, a reign of force and terror. Once violence begins in a relationship, it gets worse and more frequent over a period of time. Battering is not just one physical attack. It is a number of tactics (intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, psychological and sexual abuse) used repeatedly. Physical violence is one of those tactics. Experts have compared methods used by batterers to those used by terrorists to brainwash hostages. This is called the "Stockholm Syndrome".

MYTH: Battered women always stay in violent relationships.

FACT: Many battered women leave their abusers permanently and despite many obstacles, succeed in building a life free of violence. Almost all battered women leave at least once. The perpetrator dramatically escalates his violence when a woman leaves (or tries to), because it is necessary for him to reassert control and ownership. Battered women are often very active (and far from helpless) on their own behalf. Their efforts often fail because the batterer continues to assault, and institutions refuse to offer protection.

MYTH: The community places responsibility for violence where it belongs on the criminal.

FACT: Most people blame the victim of battering for the crime, some without realizing it. They expect the woman to stop the violence, and repeatedly analyze her motivations for not leaving, rather than scrutinizing why the batterer keeps beating her, and why the community allows it.

MYTH: Drinking causes battering.

FACT: Assailants use drinking as one of many excuses for violence, and as a way of putting responsibility for their violence elsewhere. There is a 50% or higher correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence, but no causal relationship, stopping the assailant's drinking will not end the violence. Both problems must be addressed independently.

MYTH: Stress causes domestic assault.

FACT: Many people who are under extreme stress do not assault their partners. Assailants who are stressed at work do not attack their co-workers or bosses.

Turning Point Counseling

Visit us at TurningPointCounseling.org ♦ Or call us at (800) 998-6329



MYTH: Men who batter do so because they cannot control themselves or because they have “poor impulse control”.

FACT: Men who batter are usually not violent toward anyone but their wives/partners or their children. They can control themselves sufficiently enough to pick a safe target. Men often beat women in parts of their bodies where bruises will not show. Sixty percent of battered women are beaten while they are pregnant, often in the stomach. Many assaults last for hours. Many are planned.

MYTH: If a battered woman really wanted to leave, she could just call the police.

FACT: Police have “traditionally” been reluctant to respond to domestic assaults, or to intervene in what they think of as a private matter. Police have usually temporarily separated the couple, leaving the woman vulnerable to further violence. Laws have been improved, however there is still considerable change needed in law enforcement agencies.

MYTH: If a battered woman really wanted to leave, she could easily get help from her religious leader.

FACT: Some priests, clergy, and rabbis have been extremely supportive of battered women. Others ignore the abuse, are unsupportive, or actively support the assailant’s control of his partner.

MYTH: Men who batter are often good fathers, and should have joint custody of their children.

FACT: At least 70% of men who batter their wives, sexually or physically abuse their children. All children suffer from witnessing their father assault their mother.

MYTH: If a battered woman really wanted to leave, she could just pack up and go somewhere else.

FACT: Battered women considering leaving their assailants are faced with the very real possibility of severe physical damage or even death. Assailants deliberately isolate their partners and deprive them of jobs or of opportunities for acquiring education and job skills. This combined with unequal opportunities for women in general and lack of affordable child care, makes it excruciatingly difficult for women to leave.

Turning Point Counseling

Visit us at TurningPointCounseling.org ♦ Or call us at (800) 998-6329

