

Abuser Myth vs. Fact

Myth: Batterers use violence because they get so angry that they are out of control.

Fact: Batterers who beat their partners do not usually beat other people with whom they associate. If battering reflected solely a mental illness, or inability to control oneself, then it is highly unlikely that the same target would be singled out time after time. Abusers tend not to behave in public as they do at home. For example, most abusers do not beat their boss when they become angry in the workplace, but will beat their partner when they get home. Violence is not an uncontrollable act.

Myth: Drugs and alcohol use cause the violence.

Fact: Blaming alcohol or drugs is another way to get out from under the responsibility for violent behavior. Substance abuse and domestic violence are two separate problems which can occur together, but treating one will not "cure" the other. Substance abuse may increase the frequency or severity of the violent episodes in some cases.

Myth: Stress and unemployment cause the violence.

Fact: Most people at some times in their life have been unemployed or underemployed and did not physically abuse their partners. Everybody experiences stress. Stress and unemployment are not causes of violence. Using violence is a choice and blaming it on stress or unemployment is a tactic used by batterers to shift the blame and not take responsibility for their actions.

Myth: The victim can always leave.

Fact: There are many social, economic, and cultural reasons a victim might choose to stay in an abusive relationship. These reasons are rational. Often, there is no place to go. Victims may not have a way to support their children and may feel embarrassed or humiliated about the abuse or fear that friends, family, and community will blame them for the abuse. Reluctance to leave can be for emotional or religious reasons. In addition, leaving entails substantial risks. The victim may fear that a batterer will carry out threats to harm children, friends, or family. Abuse victims are in the greatest danger of severe or even lethal attacks when they attempt to leave, and are the only ones able to judge when it is a safe time to leave. The period after a victim leaves or expresses the intention to leave is the most lethal: 75 percent of the homicides and serious assaults occur during this time. This is a powerful deterrent to leaving. Often a victims who leave are tracked by their abusers and threatened with harm if they do not return. The nature of domestic violence encourages conditions that keep a victim economically dependent and socially isolated.

Myth: Domestic violence is due to poverty or lack of education.

Fact: Domestic violence is common throughout all levels of society, whether rich or poor. It is often easier to keep the violence hidden when a person has money and important friends, but it happens nonetheless. There is no evidence to support the idea that uneducated or poor people are more likely to abuse their wives or partners than are more educated and affluent people.

Myth: I don't know a victim of domestic violence.

Fact: We all know victims. Worldwide, between one quarter and one half of all women experience violence in an intimate relationship. Victims of domestic violence may not

disclose the abuse because of embarrassment or humiliation, fear that they will be blamed for the abuse, or the danger of retaliation from the abuser.

Myth: Abusers are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration.

Fact: Domestic violence is intentional conduct, and batterers are not out of control. Their violence is carefully targeted to certain people at certain times and places. They generally do not attack their bosses or people on the streets, no matter how angry they may be. Abusers also follow their own internal rules about abusive behaviors. They often choose to abuse their partners only in private, or may take steps to ensure that they do not leave visible evidence of the abuse. Batterers also chose their tactics carefully—some destroy property, some rely on threats of abuse, and some threaten children. Studies also indicate that, in fact, some batterers become more controlled and calm as their aggressiveness increases.

Myth: Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote rural areas.

Fact: Domestic violence has been documented in both rural and urban areas. Domestic violence is a problem everywhere.

Source: Eastside Domestic Violence Program, www.edvp.org and Stop Violence Against Women, Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights www.stopvaw.org.