

Frequently Asked Questions About Domestic Violence

1. Why all the talk about women as victims of male violence? Don't women use violence against men, too?

The reality is that domestic violence is an unequal crime and women are the primary victims. The FBI estimates that 82% of intimate partner violence victims are female (BJS report from NCVS 2014). Other data collected by the National Crime Victimization Survey indicate that no matter what the rate of violence by gender, or who initiates it, women are 7 to 10 times more likely than men to be injured.

2. We know about the physical violence, but what else is a part of domestic violence?

Domestic violence is rarely an isolated incident, but rather is a pattern of coercive behavior using tactics such as emotional and verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, isolation, and economic control to gain power and control over the victim. In light of these other tactics that produce fear, the use of violence need not occur often in order to make the victim comply with her abuser's demands.

3. What happens if the abuse continues?

If nothing occurs to interrupt the pattern of abuse and violence, it is likely to occur more often and the level of injuries sustained during an incident in most cases escalates over time. As the abuse becomes more severe, the victim may feel increasingly trapped in the relationship. Yet, it is also during this same period that the victim frequently increases attempts to reach out for help.

4. Can we tell who is likely to use lethal violence against a partner?

Lethality assessment in domestic violence cases is the examination of the abuser's behavior and other indicators that may signal an increased likelihood of lethal violence. The following should be taken into account when assessing an abuser's level of violence and the risk of becoming lethal to a partner:

- Threats of suicide or homicide
- Access to weapons
- A recent or impending separation
- Obsession with partner
- Access to partner
- A history of law enforcement involvement
- Hostage-taking

5. Who are the victims?

The stereotype of an abuse victim is someone who is poor, a racial or ethnic minority, uneducated or under-educated, docile, meek and submissive. S/he is portrayed as frightened and likely to exaggerate or overstate the problems s/he is experiencing. The reality is that domestic abuse and dating violence cut across all demographic, racial and ethnic lines. Abuse victims come from every class, race, ethnicity, and educational background. While a victim may be docile or submissive, s/he is as likely to be angry about the abuse and resentful toward the abuser. S/he may not display fear to others and may minimize the problem when confronted by friends or family.

6. Why don't abuse victims just leave and stay away?

Many do leave and never return to their partners. Those who do stay are likely to do so for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Lack of resources
- Belief system that discourages or prohibits the victim from leaving

- No safe affordable place to go
- Hope that the abuser will change or the abuse will stop
- Fear that the abuser will carry out the threats to seriously harm or kill the victim, the children, or other family members if the victim tries to leave

It is a mistake to believe that leaving an abusive relationship will always bring an end to the violence. Violence often escalates at the time of separation and can include new behaviors, such as stalking, that are designed to force the victim back into the relationship. Attempting to or leaving an abusive partner substantially increases the risk of lethal violence.

7. Who are the abusers?

Just as there are erroneous stereotypes about the victim, there are stereotypes about abusers. An abusive person is also frequently portrayed as poor, a racial or ethnic minority, and either uneducated or under-educated. Many assume that because the abuser is violent toward a partner, s/he must be aggressive and/or violent in public behavior. However, abusers are found in every social class and employment status, every race and ethnic background. While they can behave like bullies, they are as likely to be civil to others and perhaps even charming in their public behavior.

8. What causes someone to abuse and control his/her partner?

Domestic violence is rarely caused by stress, anger out-of-control, mental or emotional illness, dysfunction within the relationship, poor communication skills, provocation on the part of the victim, or substance and/or alcohol abuse. However, there is a correlation between substance use or abuse prior to or during the incident, which increases the risk of serious injury or death in such incidents. While each of the factors named are frequently used as excuses for and can exacerbate the violence, they do not cause domestic violence. What abusers seek and achieve through abusive behaviors is control over the partner and dominance in the relationship. Abusers often feel this is their right and that their methods are justified.

9. What happens to children in homes where one parent is abusing the other?

It is estimated that 61-85% of children who live in violent homes are eyewitnesses, attempt to intervene, and/or experience the violence themselves. Children in these homes are at greater risk of deliberate or inadvertent injury. In addition, these children experience a host of emotional and psychological problems as a result of the violence between parents.

10. What works best to end domestic violence?

Support and services for victims and a strong message to abusers that such behavior is unacceptable and will be addressed are key. When different agencies and organizations work together to improve their community's response to domestic violence, it is referred to as a *coordinated community response*. In some areas of the country, such efforts have brought about a significant reduction in the number of serious domestic violence injuries and deaths. At the core of a coordinated response is the shared belief that domestic violence is a crime and should be taken seriously, that the victim and children should be protected from further harm, and that creating meaningful consequences for the abusers is the best way to hold them accountable.