

Domestic Violence

....it bruises EVERY aspect of a woman's life.

Domestic Violence...what is it?

NSW Health¹ policy defines domestic violence as:

'violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or former partner to control and dominate that person. Domestic violence causes fear, physical and/or psychological harm. It is most often violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour by a man against a woman. Living with domestic violence has a profound effect upon children and young people and constitutes a form of child abuse.'

Women are the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence. Research indicates that between 88% and 92% of domestic violence victims are women.²

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Domestic violence has serious social, health and economic costs for women, their families and the community. Living with domestic violence has a serious impact on the short-term and long-term psychological, emotional and physical health of women. Women may experience premature death and injury, suffer poor mental health, depression, psychiatric disorders and may engage in behaviours which affect their health, such as drug and alcohol use as a way of surviving.³

'A lot of times there is hardly any marks on you. The physical marks are really not as bad as the emotional. The physical you get used to it, emotionally it takes away yourself.' (A woman's voice, Branigan, E. (2004), *His Money or Our Money? A Report by Coburg Brunswick Community Legal and Financial Counselling Centre Inc.*)

Women survivors have pointed out that physical injuries heal much quicker than the psychological effects of abuse, which are profoundly damaging to their sense of self.⁴ These effects range from low self esteem, confusion, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, panic, depression, despair, feelings of entrapment with no way out, through to feeling suicidal. Women survivors have reported feeling unable to make decisions, feeling they have no control over their lives, and having lost a sense of their own competencies and self worth.⁵

Many women suffer domestic violence in silence - they do not talk about what is happening to them in their home. Domestic violence can make it very difficult and dangerous for women to leave – women are often scared, isolated with nowhere safe to go to, and lack the financial resources to separate safely and establish a life free of violence and abuse for themselves and their children.

Domestic violence is generally understood as physical and sexual abuse....but it is much more than that.

It is the intentional and systematic use of a range of strategies by men against women to control, coerce and dominate through fear and intimidation. It is an abuse of power that leaves women feeling physically hurt, trapped, isolated, depressed, despairing and fearful.³ The strategies of domestic violence include:

Psychological, Emotional & Verbal Abuse

- Constant put downs, name calling, insulting, ridiculing, criticising comments to deliberately undermine a woman's confidence, to make her feel bad about herself, and lead her to believe that she is useless, stupid, a bad mother and insane.
- Humiliation and denigration of a woman in public, in front of children, friends and family, at her workplace, and in private.
- Constant threats to harm / kill the woman, her children, family, friends; threats to report her to authorities; threats to take her children away; threats to commit suicide if she leaves.
- Minimizing, denying and blaming the woman for partner's abusive behaviours.
- Playing mind games, manipulation with lies and false promises.

'I can see that he was lying to me, he completely brainwashed me. I was very isolated with him, 24 hours with him, no friends, no communications, no phone, no nothing, and he was telling me such awful things about the police, about the streets, about everything...I was very stressed and I couldn't even walk on the streets, and catch a train.'

¹ NSW Health (2003), *Policy & Procedures for Identifying and Responding to Domestic Violence*, Canberra.

² Bagshaw, D. & Chung, D. (2000), *Women, Men and Domestic Violence*, Report for Partnerships against Domestic Violence, University of South Australia.

³ NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women (2005) Facts Sheet. VAW.

⁴ Taft, A (2003), *Promoting Women's Health: The Challenge of Intimate/Domestic Violence Against Women*. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Issues Paper 8. UNSW Sydney.

⁵ Domestic Violence Service Gold Coast (2005) *Domestic Violence Information*. www.domesticviolence.com.au [7/9/2006].

Social Abuse

- Controlling and prohibiting access to family, friends, social activities; the phone, transport, information, services and the internet, as ways to create isolation and limit outside contact.
- Constant surveillance, monitoring and demanding the woman account for all her activities -what she does, who she sees, talks to and what about, where she goes, with whom and for how long.
- Imprisonment in the home, being locked inside the house, being denied access to keys.
- Sabotaging new relationships.
- Imposing restrictions on personal freedoms, preventing the practice of religious and spiritual beliefs and attending cultural activities.

Financial Abuse

- Forbidding a woman to work, preventing her from seeking and maintaining employment; so that she becomes financially dependent on her partner.
- Taking the woman's earnings for his exclusive use; demanding her income be paid into a bank account which she cannot access; giving the woman an allowance, or making her ask for money.
- Forbidding a woman to have her own bank account.
- Denying access to money, credit cards, and withholding money for basic needs, food, and shelter.
- Withholding information about finances including his tax arrangements and the exclusion of the woman from participation in financial decision making.
- Denying a woman's contributions or rights to joint assets.
- Coercing a woman into taking out credit cards, loans, refinancing home mortgages, and/or apply for welfare payments causing her to inherit a debt she cannot repay.

Physical Abuse

- Deliberate and threatened use of violence and force – hitting, punching, choking, kicking, pushing, biting, burning, shooting, stabbing.
- Use of weapons to injure, threatened and frighten women and their children.
- Prevent or deprive access to personal care, food, medication, shelter.
- Destruction to property, furniture, possessions; cruelty and abuse of pets.

'For years he had me believing it was my fault. He made me think I was stupid and ugly and I deserved what I got.... I was scared.... I could never manage without him and no one would ever want me or give me a job.'

(A woman's voice)

Sexual Abuse

- Forced sexual contact, rape.
- Coercion to perform sexual acts that cause pain, humiliation, degradation.
- Forced into sex with others; accusations of sex with others.
- Physical assaults to sexual organs.
- Forced pregnancy or termination of pregnancy.

'He turned everyone against me. I had no friends, no social life, no support. He got the children to keep track of my movements and tell him what I'd been doing and who I'd talked to. I knew he'd never let me go.' (A woman's voice)

Stalking and Harassment

- Being followed, watched; movements and activities constantly monitored and under surveillance; loitering outside the workplace, and other places where the woman might go.
- Harassing a woman at home, at her workplace, when out with friends, with persistent phone calls, text messages and emails.

Separation Violence

- For many women separating from the relationship does not end the domestic violence. Post separation violence is a continuum or an escalation of the abuse which occurred during the relationship. Violence can intensify and become fatal for women after separation.

Statistics ...what they tell us.

- Abused women are 3 times more likely than non-abused women overall to be diagnosed with depression.⁴
 - 34% of Australian women who participated in a 2004 survey⁶ had been subjected to domestic violence by an intimate male partner. Of these, 28% reported verbal abuse and controlling behaviours by partners.
 - A 2004 Victorian study of intimate partner violence found it was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 – 44.⁷
 - In 2005, 49% of female victims of homicide were killed by an intimate partner (current or previous).⁸
 - Approximately 40% of women subjected to domestic violence by their current partner do not disclose their experience to anyone.⁹
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⁴ Mouzos, J & Makkai, T (2004), *Women's Experiences of domestic Violence: Finding from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)*. Research and Policy Series no56. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

⁷ VicHealth (2004), *The health costs of violence: measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

⁸ Australian Institute of Criminology (2005), *Motives for homicide*. Canberra.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistic (1996), *Womens Safety Australia*. Canberra. Australian Bureau of Statistics.