



MYTHS AND REALITIES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST MEN

MYTH #1 - ONLY MEN WHO ARE WIMPS ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE ABUSED BY WOMEN.

It is a common myth that men who are abused by women must be wimps; however nothing could be further from the truth. Men who are physically assaulted by their abusive partners via punches, bites, kicks to the groin, attacked while they are driving and hit with hard objects etc. without retaliating are the **real** men.

So many of our callers tell us that they have been put in really tough situations where their intimate partners are physically abusing them and all they can do is try to block the blows. Two of the most prominent reasons cited by callers as to why they take the abuse and never strike back are:

- As young boys/young men their parents ingrained in them how important it was to never hit girl/women.
- Men realize that they are stronger therefore they know that they could cause serious injury should they be provoked into striking back and protecting themselves.

MYTH #2 - THE ABUSER IS THE BIGGER, STRONGER PERSON AND THE VICTIM IS THE SMALLER, WEAKER PERSON.

A person who is 5'4", prone to violence, and very angry can do a lot of damage to someone who is 6'2", weighs more, and is a non-violent person. Size, weight, and/or being muscular are not good indicators of whether or not a man will be a victim or a batterer. This myth focuses only on the physical aspects of domestic violence. An abuser does not need to be bigger or stronger to throw a meat cleaver at you, rip the phone of the wall and use it as a weapon, cut up all your clothing, or threaten to call the police and tell them that you are abusing them. Violence is a matter of personal choice, not body size

Callers to our helpline have reported that they have had their arms broken, been stabbed and shot at, been hit with heavy objects that caused them to go to the emergency room to get stitches and had their intimate partners try to run them over with a vehicle. Numerous abused men have reported life-threatening injuries at the hands of their intimate partners.

MYTH #3 - WOMEN ONLY USE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SELF DEFENSE.

Victim's stories illustrate this myth best; "I started the car and she stood behind the car with the baby...then she put the baby on the ground behind the car where I couldn't see her so I wouldn't leave." "She was high on cocaine when she knifed me in the stomach. I was in the hospital for two weeks recuperating from my injuries. The cops asked if I wanted to press charges and I said no because I couldn't put the mother of my child in jail. The court ordered us to take classes. My educational classes were supposed to be for victims of domestic violence and she was supposed to go to a class for abusers. After the first class I went to I realized that I was sent to a batterer's intervention program. I never even defended myself let alone abused anyone. I don't understand why they had me go to those classes. I was told I would learn how not to be a victim but that's not what was going on in that class."

MYTH #4 - IF THE ABUSE WAS THAT BAD HE WOULD LEAVE BECAUSE A MAN CAN EASILY LEAVE A RELATIONSHIP.

Battered men report many incidences of unprovoked physical attacks to the helpline. By not holding women accountable for the violence they perpetrate we are telling women and children that it's ok

to use violence if you are a female and that there are no consequences for your violent actions.

Most victims actually minimize the violence that happens to them because of the guilt, shame, and self-blame attached to victimization, and because others do not believe them or refuse to listen. Leaving is often the hardest thing for a victim to accomplish, and is commonly harder than staying. Abusers may threaten their victims with more violence, including murder threats and telling them they will call the police and report domestic violence against them by the victim, if they leave. For the most part, incidents of domestic violence have been found to increase in severity when a victim leaves. Leaving an abusive situation requires resources such as money, housing, transportation, and support structures, all of which may have been eroded by life with an abuser.

Men stay for many of the same reasons women stay in abusive relationships. These are just a few:

- to protect their children from an abusive parent;
- family is important, when they got married it was for life;
- their abuser controls the finances;
- the abuser makes promises to change and/or get help for their violent behavior;
- they love their partners and don't want the relationship to end, just the abuse;
- they feel and/or are told they are responsible for the abuse that is perpetrated upon them.

A significant number of callers to our helpline have reported that they were presently unemployed or disabled. Another very important reason men stay is that because there is presently no definition for domestic violence against men, male victims do not realize that what is happening to them is in fact domestic violence.

MYTH # 5 - ALL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS OFFER THE SAME SERVICES TO BOTH FEMALE AND MALE VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.

In our search for resources for our helpline callers we surveyed a number of domestic violence shelter programs throughout the country over the last three years by email, phone and fax to see what services are offered to male victims and below are excerpts from some of the responses we received:

- "We have few resources for men and have received VERY few calls. WE refer callers... to the Salvation Army for shelter."
- "We only offer services to women 18 and over and their children."
- "We often get calls on our crisis line requesting shelter services for abused men. We are a dual agency that provides services for Sexual Assault victims and Battered Women. Our shelter support service is only for women and children (includes boys up to age 13)."
- "We provide services for any victim of domestic violence, male or female. Shelter services are for women and their children only at this time, due to funding regulations... In an extreme emergency, we may be able to provide temporary motel shelter, but probably for only one night."
- "We do not offer support services to male victims. We only work with women and children."

Many programs responded that they do offer all the same services regardless of gender or sexual orientation but then went on to write that they do not offer shelter or support groups to male victims.

MYTH #6 - MALE VICTIMS ARE SO RARE THAT THERE IS NO NEED TO MAKE SHELTER AND SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR THEM. HARDLY ANY MEN CALL THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINES FOR WOMEN.

"Critics pointed out that although many women were coming to shelters for protection from partner abuse, no men were seeking such shelter. (Later work has found that men were not welcome at battered women's shelters, so it was not surprising that they did not come.)"¹

A recent study done by our director indicated that 70 out of 434 men called our line seeking or in need of shelter services. Most of the programs that responded to our request for information via our survey wrote that they may in an emergency situation pay for a hotel room for a male victim for 1 to 2 days and then they would refer them to a homeless shelter for further housing.

MYTH # 7 - RESEARCH SHOWS THAT IN 95-98% OF THE CASES WOMEN ARE THE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MEN ARE THE PERPETRATORS.

This erroneous statistic has been published in domestic violence projects brochures and websites since at least 1988. The truth of the matter is that the National Domestic Violence Hotline states that in 2003 approximately 74% of their calls came from women, 12% came from men and the other 14% came from an unknown gender. Also, in a recent research report published by the U.S. Department of Justice it is estimated that 4.5 million physical assaults against women and 2.9 million physical assaults against men occur annually.¹ The 2.9 million assaults against men represent 39% of all such assaults. We estimate that males make up between 15-35% of all victims annually.

MYTH # 8 - PATRIARCHY AND OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TODAY.

Rarely can there be one reason or cause for any societal ill. The vast majority of academics, scholars, and researchers document that there are more than a half dozen theories as to why domestic violence happens in intimate partner relationships. Patriarchy and oppression of women does not account for the high rate at which domestic violence happens to lesbians, gay men, transgendered people or heterosexual men. Domestic abuse is said to occur in approximately 30 to 40% of GLBT relationships.

¹Tjaden, P. & Thoennes N. (2000). Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women, Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey, NCJ 183781 pp. 26-2

² Frieze, Irene Hanson. 2005. *Hurting the One you Love*. USA: Wadsworth publishing.