

## ?????????? Myths & Reality ????????????

**MYTH:** If you are jealous of your partner it shows that you love him or her.

**Reality:** Jealousy is about possession and control, not love. It is often used as an excuse for the use of violence in a relationship, but when we love someone, we support and encourage them, rather than trying to limit and isolate them.

**MYTH:** It mainly happens to poor women on council estates.

**Reality:** Women from poor and wealthy backgrounds experience domestic violence. However, although income levels don't affect whether you're abused, they do affect how you respond. Women on lower incomes are more likely to come to the notice of helping agencies whereas middle class women may be less likely to seek assistance because they fear personal embarrassment or the possible damage to their husband's careers if the violence was disclosed.

*'What do you think of when you hear the words 'Domestic Violence'? A woman in a council house with two black eyes and runny nosed kids married to a pot bellied beer-swiller who beats her up all week! Well, you'd be wrong, domestic violence happens across a wide social spectrum. The sooner this is realised, there will not be the stigma that there is today.'* Vanessa

**MYTH:** In a relationship, men should take the lead and be in control.

**Reality:** No one likes to be pushed around in a relationship. Aggressive, controlling behaviour is used to exert power over someone, so the relationship is unequal.

**MYTH:** It's alcohol that causes men to be violent.

**Reality:** Many men who drink are not violent to their partners and many men who are violent do not drink. Alcohol may be a factor in triggering violent incidents in the home but it's not the cause. Often when violent alcoholics seek help for their drinking, the outcome is a sober perpetrator. So it's more accurate to say that the two problems can co-exist rather than one causing the other.

Alcohol 'frees' some men up to act in certain ways by giving them what they feel to be an excuse for their abusive behaviour. However, drunkenness is never an excuse for violence. Drunk drivers are not seen as unable to help the way they conduct themselves, and their drunkenness is not seen as an excuse for the damage they cause.

**MYTH:** Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers

**Reality:** 69% of sex assailants are known to the victim.

**MYTH:** Abusers were abused themselves

**Reality:** Extensive research shows that this is not true. Of course some abusers did grow up in violent homes, but many (much research even suggests the majority) did not. This is not to say that children who grow up with an abusive parent are unaffected by that experience - of course they are - but *how* they're affected isn't as simple as always repeating what they have seen. Many children respond by developing a horror of abuse and a determination to never behave like that. It's easy for abusers to blame their violence on their childhoods - it lets them avoid responsibility for their behaviour and denies the fact that they are actively *choosing* to use violence and abuse.

**MYTH:** A woman can't be raped by her husband

**Reality:** Marital rape has been a criminal act in UK law since 1991.

**MYTH: She could just leave...**

**Reality:** There are many practical, social and emotional factors that can make leaving extremely difficult. Amongst others, these include:

- Fear of further violence: Leaving may end the relationship but it doesn't always end the violence and abuse. Many women are tracked down and further abused when they leave, often for weeks and months afterwards.
- Lack of knowledge and access to help: Despite increased awareness about domestic violence, many women don't know how to take advantage of their legal and housing rights. Even if they are aware of these services, some women may experience problems due to language difficulties, inappropriate responses from service providers, living in isolated areas or a lack of funds.
- Economic dependence: If a woman is working, she may lose her job due to needing time off work, moving too far away or staying off work so she can't find it there. For other women, becoming a single parent may mean working is no longer possible; others may face months of legal wrangling over property and other financial matters.
- Staying because of the children: Many abused women think they should stay in their relationship for the sake of their children.
- Social isolation: Most women experiencing domestic violence are extremely isolated either because their partners have deliberately tried to isolate them from sources of support including family and friends or because women are too ashamed or afraid to tell anyone. Or if they have, the responses have been unhelpful and judgmental
- Emotional dependence: Conflicting feelings of fear, shame, bewilderment, care for the abuser, hope that things will improve, a commitment to the relationship but not the violence, often contribute to a woman staying in an abusive situation.
- Lack of confidence: After living with an abusive partner, the self-esteem of most women has been eroded to the point where they no longer have confidence in themselves, including their ability to survive alone, and may believe that there are no other options.
- Cultural reasons: Many women have been brought up to believe that real fulfilment comes from being a wife and mother or that divorce is wrong and may even be encouraged to stay in the relationship by family members or religious leaders.

**MYTH:** If a girl dresses in a certain way, she's asking for sex.

**Reality:** No one ever asks to be assaulted. Unless someone consents to sex, it is rape. The way someone is dressed is no excuse for someone else's violent act.

**MYTH:** You shouldn't get involved in other people's rows.

**Reality:** Domestic violence is not a private matter although it's often been treated this way. A crime committed in private, behind closed doors, is still a crime. The cost of inaction - not dealing with the effects properly or stopping domestic abuse from happening in the first place - is huge, in Chorley & South Ribble it causes pain, suffering and costs us £86,640,000,000 every year.

We are all affected by domestic violence whether it be directly or indirectly and as such, it is everybody's business. Not getting involved won't make domestic violence disappear; it will only ensure that more women and children suffer alone.

(Adapted from Hitting Home Website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/hh/> & the Canadian White Ribbon Campaign Education Pack [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca))