



everywoman's center

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Relationship Violence Myths and Facts

Myth: *Relationship violence does not affect many people.*

Fact: About 1 in 3 American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives (The Commonwealth Fund, 1999).

Myth: *Relationship violence only occurs in heterosexual relationships.*

Fact: In figures reflective of the general population, 1 in 4 gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are battered by a partner (Jane Doe, Inc.).

Myth: *Relationship violence is only physical abuse.*

Fact: Physical abuse is only part of a larger pattern which also usually includes psychological, emotional, sexual and/or economic abuse.

Myth: *If the violent episodes don't happen often, the situation is not that serious.*

Fact: Even if the violence doesn't happen often, the threat of it remains a terrorizing means of control. No matter how far apart the violent episodes are, each one is a reminder of the one that has happened before and creates fear of the one that will happen in the future.

Myth: *Relationship violence is a momentary loss of temper.*

Fact: Relationship violence is just the opposite of a "momentary loss of temper." The abuser makes a conscious decision to abuse. The abuse is an ongoing technique to enforce control, even if the abusive partner is not willing to admit this, or not fully conscious of the *pattern*.

Myth: *If the abuser is truly sorry & promises to reform, the abuse is going to stop.*

Fact: Remorse & begging for forgiveness are often manipulative methods used by abusers to control their victims. Sometimes they are sincere in the moment, but abusers rarely stop abusing unless they are stopped, because their underlying issues have not been addressed. The abuse usually gets worse as time goes on.

Myth: *Relationship violence is caused by drugs or alcohol.*

Fact: Alcohol and drugs are not causes of abuse, even though there is sometimes a correlation between substance use and episodes of violence. Even though drugs and alcohol lower inhibitions, which can increase the frequency and severity of the abuse, they are not a cause of relationship violence. Not every abuser is a substance abuser. Not every substance abuser is abusive in relationships. Being drunk, high, or stressed may be used as an excuse by the abuser, but it's not the real reason. For example, have you ever heard of someone going out for drinks with co-workers and becoming abusive towards their boss - or the CEO of the company? Whether or not they are drunk or high, abusers choose targets for abuse whom they think can be controlled.

Myth: *Relationship violence occurs more often in poorer families and communities of color.*

Fact: Relationship violence happens in *every* community, regardless of income, educational level, racial or ethnic background. People with more money and resources available to them are less likely to use shelter services, however, that doesn't mean relationship violence is not happening. It's often easier for people (both abusers and victims) with more financial resources to hide abuse.

Myth: *Victims get hit and abused in other ways because they provoke their partners or have the type of personality that seeks out abuse.*

Fact: Many people look to the victim to understand why abuse happens. However, abusive behavior is a choice that only the abuser makes. No one can make another person hit them. While it's true that people who grow up in abusive households may not see a partner's abusive behavior as abnormal, that doesn't mean they deserve or cause abuse. Also, in order to feel less powerless, victim may, *at a particular moment*, purposely provoke an abuser. However, there is never a time when physical (or other) abuse is an appropriate response to provocation.

Myth: *The victim can walk away from the relationship.*

Fact: Victims often believe that they do not have anyplace to go where they will be safe from the abuser. The abuser often knows the victim's friends and family members and can find a victim who leaves. Even if there is no obvious physical safety concern, it is extremely difficult for a victim to leave the relationship for MANY possible reasons: financial constraints, job security concerns, social isolation, immigration status, shame, fear of hurting the abuser, believing the abuser's excuses and abuser's criticism, fear of turning their entire life upside down when already feeling fragile, etc.

Unless otherwise cited, all information was gathered from <http://www.nicholls.edu/wrso/myths.html> and modified by Everywoman's Center. For more information, call 413-577-6351.