

Prevention Pathways

Online Courses

FACT SHEET

Understanding and Preventing Male Violence

Overcoming violence against women is everyone's responsibility. The first step is to learn how to prevent violence. Some character traits and other factors increase the chances that abuse will occur. Not all men with these traits and factors are abusive, and a man who is abusive shouldn't use these traits or factors as an excuse for his actions.

Risk Factors

There is no one profile to describe who becomes violent in relationships, but research has shown that abusers share some common personality characteristics, including:¹

- Low self-esteem; lack of trust; low tolerance for stress
- Inability to take responsibility; blaming others for mistakes
- Fear of losing power and control; overly possessive with women
- Family history of substance abuse and violence
- Identifying and expressing hurt, frustration, and sadness with anger
- Extreme mood shifts (charming one moment, mean the next)

Many things can increase the chances of violence in a family. A family that has many risk factors has more chance of becoming violent than a family with one or two risk factors. Some risk factors are:²

- Alcohol and drug use
- Stress (at work, in the home)
- Poverty or problems with money
- History of abusive relationships or being a victim of family violence in the past
- Isolation; possible mental or physical problems in the family

Why Men Abuse Women

Most men who abuse women feel they have no control over their lives and their violence. Generally, abusive men have learned to make poor

choices that involve violent, abusive behavior. They also often have a hard time controlling their anger and taking responsibility for their actions.³

Substance abuse plays a large role in many abusive relationships, though not in all of them. Just because a man has a problem with alcohol does not mean that he will become violent. Similarly, a man who is violent in a relationship does not necessarily abuse alcohol. However, alcohol is present in more than half of incidences of violence, which makes it a very important factor.⁴ The presence of alcohol can make the violence worse.

Men who abuse women can be taught, with treatment, how to make better choices. They can learn to interact with others without using violence.⁵

Why Women Stay

A woman may remain in a violent relationship if:⁶

- She believes the abuse is her fault. The man tells her it is her fault.
- She loves her partner and chooses to remember him as charming and loving.
- She is scared, embarrassed, ashamed, or pressured by family to stay in the relationship, no matter what.
- She has a substance abuse problem—the partner may be her supplier.
- She does not know where to go for help or she does not have any family/friends that can help her.
- She is afraid of what her abuser would do to her and her family if she leaves.
- She does not have enough money to support herself and her children.
- She confuses her partner's jealousy with love.

Women in racial minority groups, older women, and women in same-sex relationships can face additional barriers, including:

- **Cultural pressures:** Some cultures/religions do not accept divorce, even if violence is present.
- **Immigrant Status:** Many women who come to the United States with their partners have not received legal status. Their partners may threaten to have them deported if they tell the authorities about the abuse. Women may not have friends or family to help them, may not speak the language, and may not know what services are available.
- **Age:** An older woman who is in an abusive relationship that has lasted 30,40, or 50 years may not have relevant job skills or adequate savings that would enable her to leave. Fear and the prospect of being alone may seem worse than continuing to live with the abuse.
- **Homophobia:** Gay men and lesbians, who already face prejudice from society, may be afraid to seek help for fear that their sexual preference will become public. They may think that there are no community services to help them

Ending Abuse

Men can play a role in helping to stop domestic violence and sexual assault. The majority of judges, police officers, and doctors who work with families in trouble are men.

Men can help stop abuse by sharing with their sons and other men the idea that domestic abuse and sexual assault is unacceptable. Men can also:⁷

- Serve as role models to other young men or children.
- Examine their own behavior with women.
- Support public figures who favor gender equality and non-violence.

For more information for consumers, go to www.samhsa.gov/preventionpathways and click on “courses” to find the online course, “It Won’t Happen to Me: *Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women.*”

References

¹ Wilson, K.J. (1997). When violence begins at home. Salt Lake City, UT: Publishers Press.

² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2000). Male batterers [electronic fact sheet]. Washington, D.C.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/malebat.htm

³ Fazzone, PA; Holton, JK, and Reed, BG. (1997). Substance abuse treatment and domestic violence. Treatment improvement protocol series 25. (DHHS Publication No. SMA 97-3163). Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. (1999). Myths about domestic violence. St. Paul, MN: Author.

⁶ Wilson, K.J. (1997).

⁷ Family Violence Prevention Fund. (2000). What can men do to stop domestic violence? Retrieved from www.silcom.com/~paladin/madv/mencando.html

