

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN RESOURCES: ISSUES YOU MAY BE FACING

WHAT IS WOMAN ABUSE?

TYPES OF ABUSE

WOMEN ABUSE: MYTHS VERSUS REALITY

ISSUES YOU MAY BE FACING

IS YOUR PARTNER VERBALLY, FINANCIALLY, EMOTIONALLY,  
PHYSICALLY AND/OR SEXUALLY ABUSING YOU?

HOW TO BE SAFER WHEN YOUR PARTNER ABUSES YOU OR  
THREATENS YOUR LIFE

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PARTNER ABUSES YOU OR  
THREATENS YOUR LIFE

WHAT IS WOMAN ABUSE?

DEFINITION OF ABUSE:

Woman abuse involves the intent by a male partner to intimidate and control his female partner, either by threat or by use of physical force on her person or her property. The purpose of abuse is to induce fear and thus gain control. Underlying all abuse is a power imbalance between the victim and offender.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN OLDER WOMEN IS BROADLY  
DEFINED AS:

- actual or threatened physical or sexual violence used by an intimate partner to cause death, disability, injury or harm to victims, and psychological abuse used to cause trauma in victims;
- physically violent acts include but are not limited to scratching, shoving, choking, punching and shaking;

- sexually violent acts include the use of physical force to compel victims to engage in a sexual act against their will, an attempted or completed sex act on [sic] a person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act, and abusive sexual contact; and
- psychological abuse includes acts such as controlling what victims can and cannot do, using verbal put downs, isolating victims, prohibiting access to transportation or the telephone, and inflicting humiliation.

(Amy E. Bonomi, A. et al. (2007). Intimate Partner Violence in Older Women. The Gerontologist. 47 (1), 34)

## TYPES OF ABUSE

### EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL

Emotional and psychological abuse involves threats to children, family, pets or self:

Examples include:

- threats to take the children away
- insults, name-calling, put-downs, abusive language
- cheating, lying
- mind games
- throwing away or destroying possessions
- threatening with a weapon
- devaluing a woman's opinion
- ridiculing a woman's family and friends
- using children as pawns to control or manipulate
- forcing a woman to do degrading things
- isolating from family and friend
- controlling or attempting to control all of a woman's activities.

### ECONOMIC

Economic abuse involves any material threat to a woman's ability to survive independently with or without children

Examples include:

- deprivation of money
- making women account for every penny
- controlling all access to cash and/or credit
- stealing money
- denial of access to financial records, bank statements, monetary resources
- minimizing resources necessary to sustain basic needs
- coercing women into co-signing loans
- forcing women to cover past debts
- lying about money earned or spent, payment of bills

- making women beg for money

## SEXUAL

Sexual abuse involves any type of unwanted sexual approach, innuendo, suggestion or act:

Examples include:

- jokes demeaning to women
- unwanted touching
- sexual insults
- forced, non-consenting sex
- sexual accusations
- distasteful, painful sexual acts [i.e., rape]
- flaunting stories of affairs
- comparisons to other women
- being treated as a sex object
- denying pleasure to control or manipulate
- unwanted use of pornographic material
- engaging in risky sexual behaviours
- refusing to accept no as an answer to request for sexual contact

## PHYSICAL

Physical abuse involves any type of physical force used to compel or control a woman, any aggressive behaviour done by the abuser to a woman's body:

Examples include:

- pushing
- pulling
- grabbing
- spitting
- holding, restraining
- pinching
- pulling hair
- slapping
- hitting
- punching
- choking
- throwing objects
- using weapons
- poisoning
- clubbing
- whipping
- burning

- throwing acid
- stabbing
- shooting
- killing

## WOMEN ABUSE: MYTHS VERSUS REALITY

The abuse of women has been shrouded in myth. All these myths have perpetuated the mistaken notion that the victim has precipitated her own assault. It is important to refute all myths surrounding abused women in order to understand why abuse happens, how it affects victims and how it can be stopped.

Abused women are found in all age groups, races, ethnic and religious groups, educational levels, and socioeconomic groups. Who are the abused women? If you are a woman, there is a 50% chance it could be you.

Some facts (source: canadianwomen.org):

- Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16
- 67% of all Canadians say they personally know at least one woman who has been sexually or physically assaulted
- Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. In 2011, from the 89 police reported spousal homicides, 76 of the victims (over 85%) were women
- On any given day in Canada, more than 3,300 women (along with their 3,000 children) are forced to sleep in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence. Every night, about 200 women are turned away because the shelters are full.
- Each year, over 40,000 arrests result from domestic violence—that’s about 12% of all violent crime in Canada. Since only 22% of all incidents are reported to the police, the real number is much higher.

You can read more facts about violence against women at:

<http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>

### MYTH 1: ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE CAUSES PEOPLE TO BECOME VIOLENT.

- A substance cannot abuse you; only a person can.
- Alcohol or drug use may stop and yet the violence continue.
- We often hear, “he’s only violent when he drinks”. Even authority figures have been known to believe this myth.

- Those who study the dynamics of abuse, however, say there is no valid research to indicate that alcoholism and/or drug abuse cause violence \*\*\*
- The association that links drinking with being violent is a myth
- Most men who are drinkers do not assault their partners violently
- When men who are drinkers DO assault their partners, however, it is more likely to cause injury
- If a man is a drinker, it is likely he will be abusive in many other ways—e.g. financially [alcohol is expensive], emotionally [they are only thinking about themselves, not you], psychologically [mind games are fun and help defer responsibility], verbally [blaming the drinking on a partner and/or accusations about infidelity are common and also defer responsibility ]
- A majority (some say 76 percent) of physically abusive incidents occur in the absence of alcohol use. According to the Women's Rural Advocacy Program, no evidence supports a cause-and-effect relationship between alcohol and abuse—the relatively high incidence of alcohol abuse among men who use violence must be viewed as the overlap of two separate social problems.

BEWARE—Men who assault women often use drinking/drugs\*\*\* as one of many excuses for their violence and as a way to place the responsibility elsewhere. Stopping the abusers' addiction will not stop the violence. Alcohol does not and cannot make a man abuse a woman, but it is frequently used as an excuse. Many men drink and do not abuse anyone as a result. On the other hand many men abuse women when they are sober. It can be easier for some men and for some women to believe that the violence would not have happened if a drink had not been taken. It's part of the denial process. Alcoholism and battering do share some similar characteristics -- both may be passed from generation to generation, both involve denial or minimization of the problem; both involve isolation of the family.

- Physical abuse and substance abuse need to be addressed separately, as overlapping yet independent problems.
- When alcohol is involved, women may find themselves taking a drink to cope with the abuse. However, please note that a victim's intoxication may impede legal processes if police are called to the home.

NOTE: different drugs [including prescribed medications] have varying effects on different people. Some substances ARE known to have effects that under specific circumstances can lead to violent behaviour . . . e.g. The negative effects of methamphetamine can be extreme and alarming, including paranoid delusions, hallucinations, aggressive behaviour and impulsive violence. Taking high doses of cocaine for a long time can lead to panic attacks, psychotic symptoms, such as paranoia (feeling overly suspicious, jealous, or persecuted), hallucinations (seeing, hearing, smelling, etc., things that aren't real) and delusions (false beliefs) or erratic, bizarre and sometimes violent behaviour. In addition, people addicted may commit violence to get money to feed their addiction [a conscious choice].

**References:**

## MYTH 2: WOMEN WHO ARE IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE THERE BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE THERE.

### SUB-MYTHS TO SUPPORT/ JUSTIFY BELIEVING MYTH 2:

**Women are masochistic**

**Women enjoy being beaten/hit**

**Women are weak by nature**

Fact: No one wants to be beaten or abused in any way [see types of abuse]

This myth upholds an abuser's right to have control over women and therefore over an entire family.

Women victims often make repeated attempts to leave violent relationships but are prevented from doing so by increased violence and threats along with control tactics on the part of the abuser as well as a myriad of factors inhibiting their independence [see below].

### FACTORS WHICH INHIBIT A VICTIM'S ABILITY TO LEAVE INCLUDE:

- fear of further violence increased by partner's jealousy or possessiveness
- economic dependence
- few viable options for housing and support
- unhelpful responses from the criminal justice system
- unhelpful responses from social service agencies
- unhelpful responses from one's own family members [example 'you made your bed so lie in it']
- social isolation
- sense of helplessness [may be compounded by low self esteem]
- depression [often accompanies sense of helplessness]
- cultural or religious constraints
- a commitment to the abuser and the relationship
- and always . . . fear of further violence

In addition, if women are caring for children, it becomes increasingly more difficult with each additional inhibiting factor, a situation well appreciated by most abusers.

It has been estimated that the danger to a victim increases by 70% when she attempts to leave, as the abuser often escalates his use of violence when he senses he is losing control.

## MYTH 2: WOMEN ARE JUST AS VIOLENT AS MEN

- Research in Scotland has found that wife assault constitutes the largest proportion of family violence, almost 76%, as opposed to 1.1% for husband assault.
- Furthermore, more than 93% of charges related to spousal assault in Ontario, Canada are laid against men.
- Most charges laid against women are counter-charges laid by an abusive partner or stem from acts of self-defense. [Ontario]
- Fact: Women rarely have the upper hand physically.
- Many times women are reported to 'throw the first punch'. Knowing that their abuser is about to beat them, women may do this to ensure that their abuser does not get away with hurting them once again without consequence.

See Springtide resources: <http://www.springtideresources.org>

#### MYTH 4: WOMEN ASK FOR IT. ALSO KNOWN AS VICTIM PROVOCATION

Victim provocation is no more common in domestic violence than in any other crime yet it is used extensively to explain the violence of men towards women they claim to love and cherish

Example: Would you suggest that a victim of mugging 'asked' the mugger to take his briefcase [?] Or her purse? What would happen in a court of law if the mugger used provocation as a defense? `

Fact: some believe that the woman provokes, torments or nags to the point that the abuser loses self control and this attitude blames the victim and not the abuser for a reprehensible act, one for which the offender must take responsibility. No one asks to be beaten [Manitoba Family Services, Abuse Myths and Facts, 1996]

#### MYTH 5: CHILDREN DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON

Children who are exposed to violence may grow up believing abuse is part of a normal relationship. As they learn what they live, many may grow up to be abusers or abuse victims themselves.

Research shows that regardless of whether children are in the room where abuse is occurring, they are aware that something is happening that hurts their parent and they are consistently frightened by the lack of security this involves

Many parents believe that children are unaware of the situation occurring in the home—perhaps because they were 'sleeping' at the time. This may be a way to avoid seeing the damage that is being done. Whether children appear to be aware or not, abuse and violence occurring in their home environment does not leave them unscathed. In fact, some studies indicate that child adjustment problems may relate more to exposure to domestic abuse than to separation/divorce of parents or loss of one parent.

**CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE IN THE HOME ARE AT INCREASED RISK FOR BEING ASSAULTED DIRECTLY AND DEVELOPING ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS SUCH AS:**

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- Blaming themselves for their parents problems and the violence
- difficulties sleeping
- nightmares
- bed wetting
- insomnia
- difficulty concentrating
- changes in eating patterns
- headaches and stomach aches
- acting out at school

**MYTH 6: ABUSE IS A LOWER CLASS CRIME**

Abuse cuts across all socio-economic, educational, racial, cultural, religious, disability and sexual orientation lines. If women are at a disadvantage due to any of these factors, it makes it more difficult for them to admit to abuse and leave an abusive relationship.

- no woman wants to believe the person she loves is an abuser
- no woman wants to believe that she is a victim
- society is more inclined to see women in the so-called 'disadvantaged classes' as deserving of abuse; therefore women in these situations may be more likely to believe society's myths about abuse and see themselves as provoking abuse

**All myths must be challenged in order for victims to believe in their right to a life free of abuse.**

**ISSUES YOU MAY BE FACING**

**IS YOUR PARTNER VERBALLY, FINANCIALLY, EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY AND/OR SEXUALLY ABUSING YOU?**

No woman expects to be hurt by someone who is close to her. Feeling shocked, confused, and even questioning yourself, over and over again, about why your partner is hurting you are common responses. Many women blame themselves especially when they are repeatedly told by their partners, and at times, even by their relatives, friends, and co-workers that it is their fault.

**What's important to always remember is that there is no excuse for any form of abuse towards another person** - it's not your fault and you are not responsible for your partner's abusive behaviour.

Also **remember that you are not alone** - reach out and speak to someone you can trust, who is willing to listen. If you feel there is no one you can talk to, there are many programs for women in your situation, throughout Toronto, that can assist you in getting the support you need.



## SOME COMMON SIGNS OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS:

Has your partner ever:

- insulted or called you names?
- put you down in front of others?
- made hurtful comments about you, your body, your relationships with others?
- continually criticized you?
- taken control of finances?
- denied you access to pocket money?
- monitored your finances?
- kept you from managing family finances?
- tried to intimidate you? (slammed his fist on things; made threatening actions or raised his hand to your face as though he was going to hit you; destroyed property; etc.)
- threatened to hurt you or a family member if you leave?
- threatened to hurt your pet?
- threatened to take the children away if you leave?
- threatened to hurt him/herself if you didn't do what was said or if you left?
- threatened to send you back home or stop sponsoring you?
- threatened to report you to immigration?
- tried to control what you do, and monitor who you speak with and where you go?
- tried to isolate you from friends and family?
- destroyed your personal belongings?
- forced you to do something against your will?
- tried to restrict you from using the phone, driving the car, working, going to school?
- made decisions without consulting you?
- prevented you from getting medical attention?
- acted in a jealous and suspicious way towards you?
- blamed you for the abuse?
- been physically hurtful?
- forced you to engage in sexual acts against your will?
- promised that you will never be hurt again and then promise to change?

## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PARTNER ABUSES YOU OR THREATENS YOUR LIFE

Ongoing physical, verbal and emotional abuse can be terrifying, especially when your life is being threatened. Many women, who live in abusive situations, often feel a variety of mixed emotions including guilt and self-blame.

Many also think that if they act differently around the person abusing them, the abuse may stop. What's important to remember is that it's only the person responsible for the hurtful behaviour who can stop the abuse. They are responsible for their behaviour. It's never your fault.

One of the many abusive tactics used against women is threatening their life if they go to the police or if they leave. If this has happened to you, it's no doubt that you feel terrified and afraid, however it is also important to listen to your fear, as it may be a signal that you may be in danger of being seriously hurt.

### **PROTECT YOURSELF WITH A SAFETY PLAN**

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In your situation, it's important to have a Safety Plan in place to increase your safety. Here is a list of tips that you can follow to put together your own Safety Plan:

- Call the Police if You Feel Threatened
- In Case of Danger, Decide Where to Go Ahead of Time
- Be Aware of Any Weapons in the House
- Set Aside Money for Yourself in Case You Have to Leave
- Teaching Your Kids How to Contact the Police in an Emergency
- Have a Packed Bag Ready
- It's Important to Never Lose Hope
- If You Decide to Escape from an Abusive Relationship

### **CALL THE POLICE IF YOU FEEL THREATENED**

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- Any threats that are made against you need to be taken seriously. If you believe you are in danger it is important that you call the police.
- When you call the police, try to speak to them privately and tell them exactly what happened. In an emergency situation, police are required to restore order by calming down the situation, determine if there is a need for medical attention and conduct a thorough investigation.
- Everyone involved in the incident will be spoken to separately. Officers are obligated to arrest or lay charges against the abuser when reasonable grounds exist (i.e. that an offence has been committed).
- If the abusive partner has left the scene, then an attempt will be made to search for the individual.
- Officers are also required to assess whether you are feeling safe and provide appropriate resources.

### **IN CASE OF DANGER, DECIDE WHERE TO GO AHEAD OF TIME**

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- Decide where you will go and what you will do if you are in danger.
- Plan your emergency exits and know them well. Identify which doors, windows, elevators, stairs or other escape routes would be best to take.

- If you have a car, try to keep it in good repair and fuelled at all times so that it won't fail you.
- If you can, take the children with you when you leave.

### **BE AWARE OF ANY WEAPONS IN THE HOUSE**

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Know where any weapons in the house are stored. Weapons can include kitchen knives, guns, hammers, other tools, and any heavy objects.

### **SET ASIDE MONEY FOR YOURSELF IN CASE YOU HAVE TO LEAVE**

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- Open a bank account in your own name.
- Ensure that bank statements and any other documents are not mailed to you.
- Save as much money as you can and identify who would lend you some money if needed.
- Always keep some money hidden, in your house, in case you need to leave quickly.

### **TEACHING YOUR KIDS HOW TO CONTACT THE POLICE IN AN EMERGENCY**

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- If you have children, teach them how to call the police when you are being assaulted, and have practice sessions with them.
- Make up a code word to use with your children so that they can alert someone that you trust that you are in danger and you need the police.

### **HAVE A PACKED BAG READY**

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- Have a packed bag ready and keep it in a secret but accessible place in case you need to leave quickly.
- Important things to take with you if you have to escape quickly include:
  - extra clothing for both you and your children
  - emergency phone numbers (e.g. police, women's shelters, women's helplines, distress lines, social assistance, friends and relatives you can trust)
  - extra car and house keys
  - passports
  - birth certificates
  - marriage certificate
  - immigration documents
  - Ontario Health Card
  - social insurance card
  - wallet
  - bankbook
  - charge cards
  - prescriptions and other medicines
  - toys and other items you usually need to care for your child/children

### **IT'S IMPORTANT TO NEVER LOSE HOPE**

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- Although your situation may be difficult and you may feel that there is no way out, it is important that you never lose hope.
- Always remember that you are not alone and there are people who care that can support you.
- It's also important to remember the most dangerous time is when you leave.
- Review your safety plan on a regular basis.
- Talk to someone who you trust and can support you.

### **IF YOU DECIDE TO ESCAPE FROM AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

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It takes a lot of courage to make the decision to escape an abusive relationship and move forward with your life. For many women it takes a very long time, even years to make the decision to leave.

Leaving an abusive relationship means a big change in your life. For many women, it may involve adjusting to a new home environment, new routine and lifestyle, new challenges and stressors, and a new life altogether.

Before, during and after making the change, what's most important is that you pace yourself by taking one step at a time. Every single step is an accomplishment. You may also need time to heal, to regain your confidence and motivation.

## **WHAT TO DO AFTER YOU'VE LEFT AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

Many women, after leaving an abusive relationship, find themselves wanting to rebuild their lives. Many say that before meeting and settling down with the person who later abused them, they had aspirations and goals in life.

Since leaving the relationship, however, many feel that they are not the person that they used to be, that they've lost interest in life and things around them, they seem to have no clear direction in life and that they feel numb.

Given what you've been through, these feelings are normal. While in an abusive relationship, for many women, their only focus, day in and day out, hour by hour was to survive the abuse. Being in an abusive relationship can interrupt the goals and aspirations you may have had at one point in your life. Now that the abuse is no longer a day to day concern, it's natural to feel like you don't know where to start with your new life.

What's most important is that you create a balanced lifestyle for yourself. This includes doing more for yourself in areas of personal wellness where you may be lacking, and removing from your life habits and behaviours that may not be healthy and beneficial to your overall well-being.

### **TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED ON YOUR JOURNEY TO A NEW LIFE**

- Eat healthy and regularly.

- Exercise regularly. This will help you feel better and increase your energy level
- Try to get enough sleep and rest.
- Select and participate in an activity, hobby, or something you will enjoy doing.
- Reward yourself regularly on your accomplishments, no matter how small they may seem.
- Begin thinking about your future goals and how to become more self-reliant.
- Surround yourself with positive individuals and/or a community you affiliate with, that you can trust, and get support.
- Take time to relax and do things that you can gain pleasure from including reading, poetry, listening to music, visiting an art gallery.
- Look for ways to increase your knowledge on how to live a healthy lifestyle.
- Look for ways to gain information on personal wellness.
- Consider doing some volunteer work for a charity that you admire.
- If you are unemployed, or even if you are employed, consider seeing a career counsellor to explore your potential and other opportunities.
- Think positively.