

## Common Myths about Domestic Violence

- **Women often provoke assaults and deserve what they get.**
  - Abuse is never justifiable and it is not the victim's fault.
  - This myth supports the idea that the woman is responsible for her own victimization. Abusive men often claim their partner provoked them in order to avoid taking responsibility for their abusive behaviors. In fact, the true source of violence is the batterer's desire for power and control over his partner.
  - Assaulted women report a wide range of incidents that trigger violence. For instance, "I fried his eggs the wrong way," or "I went out with friends without asking his permission."
- **Battering only affects a small percentage of the population.**
  - The FBI estimates that a woman is beaten every 9 seconds - the most commonly occurring crime in the U.S.
  - In at least 2/3 of all marriages, the woman experiences physical abuse at least once. (That figure may under-represent the crime, because it does not take into account the number of incidents between couples who are not married.)
- **Wife assault is a new social problem.**
  - Wife assault is not new. It has been condoned throughout history. For example, the widely used term "rule of thumb" comes from a 1767 English common law that permitted a husband to "chastise his wife with a whit or rattan no wider than is the thumb."
- **Assaulted women could leave their abusive husbands if they wanted to.**
  - A woman may stay in an abusive relationship for many reasons. For example:
    - \*She hopes the relationship will get better.
    - \*She doesn't think she can support herself and her children on her own.
    - \*She's lost self-esteem because of her partner's abuse.
    - \*She has nowhere to go.
    - \*She's worried about her or her partner's immigration status.
    - \*She's been isolated from friends and family and lacks a support system to help her.
  - Fear is the primary reason women may stay. She may have been threatened and fear for her own or her children's safety.
  - A woman is 75% more likely to be murdered or seriously injured if she attempts to leave her partner than if she stays.
  - Even if she leaves, she knows that she may be found and forced to return to the relationship or subjected to further abuse, harassment, and threats.

- **Wife assault occurs more often among certain groups of people.**
  - Battering does not discriminate. It occurs across all economic, social, religious, racial, and ethnic barriers.
- **Women with low incomes are battered more frequently and more violently than middle class women.**
  - Battering occurs at all income levels. Women with more financial resources may hide their abuse more easily by using private therapists, physicians, and attorneys. Many upper and middle-class women find that disclosure of the violence in their lives may result in harm to their career or their partner's career, or may feel that they won't be believed.
  - Violence in more affluent groups is also less visible because these women are less likely to use shelters, legal clinics, and other social services less often.
- **Most batterers have mental illnesses or are alcoholics.**
  - Batterers come from all walks of life. The percentage of psychiatric and substance abuse problems found in men who batter is no different than in the general population of men.
  - The overwhelmingly high rate of abuse signifies that this is not a problem limited to a small number of people with psychiatric or alcohol problems.
  - Abuse also occurs most often in the home, and the injuries are directed at parts of the body where bruises don't show. This type of selective abuse is not characteristic of the truly mentally ill.
- **Drinking causes battering.**
  - Drinking may increase the violence, and the woman may sustain more severe injuries; however, to blame the abuse on alcohol takes the responsibility for the violent behavior away from the abuser.
  - Even when drunk, most batterers will still choose to be violent only with their partners.
  - Many batterers never drink, and many people who abuse alcohol never batter.
  - Some women report that they encourage their partners to drink because it makes them pass out rather than turn violent.
- **Batterers are violent in all of their relationships.**
  - Most batterers choose to only be violent with their partner. Many women feel they are to blame for the abuse because their partner is only violent with them.
  - There are relatively few consequences for using abuse and violence in an intimate relationship, while the use of violence outside the home is more likely to be penalized.

- **Lesbians do not abuse their partners.**
  - Battering occurs in relationships where there is an imbalance of power used to control one's partner. Lesbian relationships are not immune to the use of power and control.
  - Lesbians who experience abuse may face more obstacles, such as social biases and discrimination in the legal system.
- **Women who live with an abusive partner tend to be helpless or mentally ill themselves.**
  - There is a difference between feeling helpless and being helpless. Few women who experience violence in their lives can be described as helpless. Battered women are courageous, innovative problem-solvers who manage to survive dangerous and often life-threatening situations.
  - This myth supports the notion that women who are abused are weak, hopeless, despairing women who need to be "rescued" from their situation. Belief in this myth prevents us from being able to accurately assess a woman's strength.
- **Men who abuse their wives and women who are abused batter their children.**
  - Some batterers also abuse or threaten their children - sometimes as a way of maintaining power and control over the woman. 55% of the abusers beat their children, and children frequently become accidental victims of assault as they try to stop a fight or protect their mother.
  - Some men may use their appearance as a loving father as a tactic to make the woman look like the "bad" parent and the dad the "good, fun, and not depressed" parent.
  - Certainly, children who grow up in homes where violence occurs are affected by that violence. It is important to examine the potential effects on these children, as 87% of battered women report that their children are aware of the violence in their homes.