

FOR FAMILIES

.....the link between the need and the solution

Fall 2004
Newsletter

FOR Families is a community service offered through the City of Irvine for those who live or work in Irvine.

The Face of Domestic Violence

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*I read and walked for miles at night
along the beach,
Writing bad verse and searching
endlessly for
Someone wonderful who would step out
of the darkness
And change my life. It never crossed my
mind that the
Person could be me.
.....Anna Quindlen*

What is Domestic Violence?

For the purposes of this article, domestic violence is defined as an attempt by a current or former intimate partner to establish power, control and fear in a relationship through the use of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. The American Medical Association defines each type of abuse as follows:

- **Physical Abuse** - hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, pushing, shoving, choking and other ways of physically harming a person.
- **Sexual Abuse** - when a person is forced to participate in a sexual situation against his/her will,

including pursuing sexual activity when the victim is afraid to say no.

- **Psychological Abuse** - when a person is threatened, intimidated, humiliated, yelled at, blamed, made to feel inferior or stupid or otherwise emotionally hurt.



Some of the additional methods of gaining power in an attempt to control the other person include: isolation (i.e., controlling what the person does, who they see, who they talk to, etc.), making light of or denying the abuse happened, using the children (i.e., making the victim feel guilty about the children, threatening to take the children away, etc.), claiming male privilege

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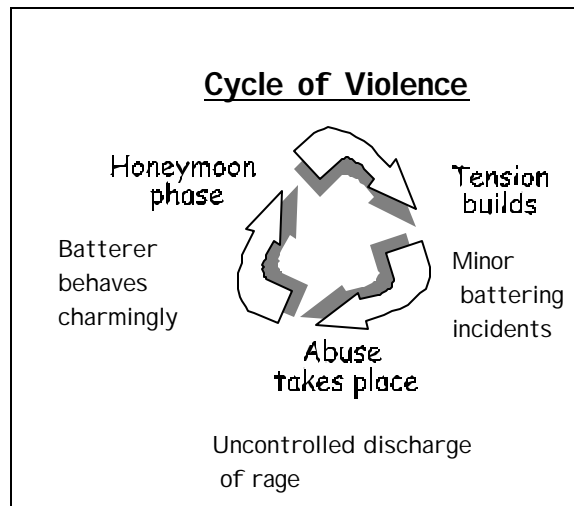
(i.e., narrowly and traditionally defining male and female roles, making all of the major decisions, etc.) and economic abuse (i.e., preventing the victim from earning money, controlling all access to the family's money, etc.).

How Prevalent is Domestic Violence?

Between 85-95% of all domestic violence victims are female. The Surgeon General ranks domestic violence as the leading cause of injury to women 15-45, more than rapes, muggings and automobile accidents combined. With a woman beaten every nine seconds in the United States, the American Medical Association estimates that over four million women are victims of severe assaults by boyfriends and husbands each year. About 1 in 4 women is likely to be abused by a partner in her lifetime.

The Cycle of Violence

Lenore Walker first proposed the cycle of violence in her book, *The Battered Woman*. Walker developed the model based on a three years of research conducted with victims of battering. Walker began to see a pattern in the relationship between the victim and the abuser. Based on her findings, Walker proposed a three-phase Cycle of Violence consisting of the Tension Building Phase, the Acute Battering Incident Phase and the Kindness and Contrite Loving Behavior Phase, also known as the Honeymoon Phase. The Cycle of Violence is now a well established and widely accepted theory of domestic violence and is used in the treatment of victims and abusers by domestic violence programs throughout the United States and abroad. However, it is important to remember that not all domestic violence relationships fit the cycle.



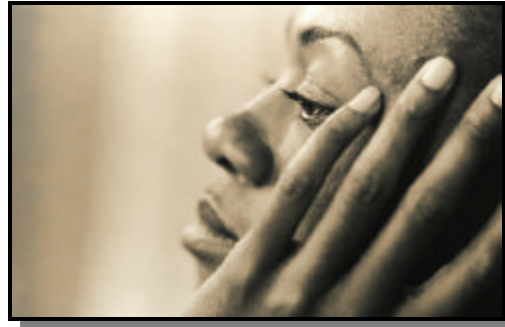
Phase I: The Tension Building Phase

The Tension Building Phase is characterized by a gradual increase in tension in the relationship, which causes the batterer to initiate minor abuse incidents. After the minor incident the level of tension may decrease but only slightly and for only a short period of time. The Tension Building Phase constantly increases in anticipation of Phase II. As the Tension Building Phase continues, minor battering incidents become more frequent until an acute battering incident occurs.

Often in this phase, the victim believes she can control the batterer, that she can prevent his anger from escalating and consequently prevent him from becoming more abusive. For example, one woman reported that she cooked all of her husband's favorite foods, forbade their children from making any noise and unplugged the phone to avoid calls from her family in an attempt to prevent her husband from "having a mood". However, in some cases victims become so agitated from the anticipation of the next phase, in which much more severe abuse occurs, that they initiate Phase II. As one woman put it, "I just couldn't take the tension anymore. I wanted to get it [the acute battering incident] over with so I started a fight with him [the abuser]."

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There are many resources for those in an abusive relationship, including shelters, legal assistance, counseling, etc. However, if you are in immediate danger, you should call 911. Also, it is important to develop a safety plan, some elements of which include:



- arranging in advance where you will stay if you need to leave home
- the phone number of a domestic violence shelter
- a packed bag hidden but accessible so you can leave quickly
- a code word you can use with your children, neighbors, family and friends if you need the police

For assistance in developing a safety plan call: **FOR Families at (949) 724-6650.**

Domestic Violence Community Resources

Counseling/Referral

Emergency Hotline/Sexual Assault Crisis (24 hr hotline)	(714) 957-2737
FOR Families City of Irvine	(949) 724-6650
Orange County Sexual Assault Network (24 hr. hotline)	(949) 831-9110
TDD (for hearing impaired)	(800) 787-3224

Hospitals

Irvine Medical Center, 16200 Sand Canyon, Irvine	(949) 753-2000
Saddleback Memorial Medical Center, 24451 Health Care Center Drive, Laguna Hills	(949) 837-4500
Western Medical Center, 1001 N. Tustin, Santa Ana	(714) 835-3555

Legal

Domestic Violence Assistance Program (help with filing a restraining order)	(714) 935-7956
Legal Aid Society of Orange County	(714) 835-8806
Restraining Orders (informational recording)	(714) 973-0134
Victim Witness (services for victims of crimes)	(949) 476-4655
Western State Legal Clinic (open only during school semester)	(714) 491-8448

Miscellaneous

Child Abuse Registry (report child abuse)	(714) 938-0505
Crime Survivors (emotional support for victims of crimes)	(949) 872-7895
VINE Service (receive immediate notification of release of suspect from custody)	(800) 721-8021

Shelters

Human Options (24 hr. hotline)	(949) 854-3554
Interval House (24 hr. hotline)	(714) 891-8121
Laura's House	(949) 498-1511
Women's Transitional Living Center (24 hr. hotline)	(714) 992-1931

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Phase II: The Acute Battering Incident Phase

The Acute Battering Incident Phase is characterized by the batterer's uncontrolled discharge of rage. Unlike Phase I, in Phase II the batterer exhibits a lack of control and inflicts major damage on the victim. The type of abuse and when it will occur is unpredictable. Victims report that during this phase they know the batterer is out of control and the situation very dangerous, consequently they often do not resist, instead they try to calm and appease the batterer in the hope of curtailing the psychological and/or physical abuse.

After the acute battering incident victims often minimize their psychological and/or physical injuries and rarely seek help unless their physical injuries are so severe they necessitate medical intervention. In general they do not report the incident to the police for fear of reprisal by the abuser.

Research with batterers indicates that they attempt to rationalize their abusive behavior. The batterer often points to a number of minor annoyances committed by the victim as a justification for his abusive behavior.

Phase III: The Honeymoon Phase

The Honeymoon Phase is a period of relative calm in an otherwise very tense and abusive cycle. During this phase the batterer often acts charming and lovingly toward the victim, profusely apologizes for his behavior and begs for forgiveness. He often states that he is committed to changing his behavior. The victim generally feels lonely, angry, frightened and hurt after the Acute Battering Incident Phase but after a few days in the Honeymoon Phase she begins to forget about the abuse. In addition, if she brought criminal charges against the batterer, she is very likely to drop them. There is no clear end to this phase but the batterer's loving, kind and caring behavior gradually gives way to minor battering incidents and the cycle begins anew.

The Cycle of Violence can happen hundreds of times in an abusive relationship. While each stage lasts a different amount of time depending on the couple, domestic violence usually continues over a long period of time with the abuse becoming more frequent and severe. The total cycle can take anywhere from a few hours to a year or more to complete. The longer the couple remains together, the greater the incidences of battering and the fewer and shorter the episodes of the Honeymoon Phase.

Why Victims Stay

Leaving the abuser is not as simple as it may seem. As previously described, the batterer often controls all money so the victim has no way to support herself or her children if she leaves. In fact, many victims do not even have enough money to get a hotel room for a night. Furthermore, the victim frequently finds herself without any social support for a number of reasons: because the batterer has prevented her from maintaining these relationships; friends and family cannot tolerate her having stayed with the abuser so they distance themselves from her; the victim ends her relationships with them to avoid the pain she feels from their disapproval of the relationship. Furthermore, many victims feel that no one can protect them from the abuser, not even the legal system, particularly if the abuser threatens to kill them or hurt the children.

On a more psychological level, many victims have come to believe that endurance of physical and psychological pain is the price they must pay for love. Statistics indicate that one-third of women who are physically abused by a husband or boyfriend grew up in a household where their mothers were abused. In addition to abusive behavior between their parents, often victims of domestic violence were abused themselves as children. However, many of domestic violence victims were not abused or exposed to abuse as children.

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Kids Hurt Too

Characteristics of Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Research indicates that 80%-90% of children living in homes with domestic violence are aware of the abuse in their families even if they do not witness the abuse or are very young. Children who are exposed to domestic violence, which includes awareness of abuse, may experience a variety of symptoms, some of which are detailed below.



- **High anxiety levels** due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a condition in which victims of overwhelming and uncontrollable experiences are subsequently psychologically affected by feelings of intense fear and extreme vulnerability, loss of safety, loss of control and helplessness
- **Depression** resulting from a sense of helplessness
- **Obsessive compulsive behavior (OCD)** such as hair or eyelash pulling, extreme neatness, repetitive behaviors and/or ruminating thoughts
- **Insomnia** resulting from anxiety, depression and/or PTSD
- **Hearing and speech problems** due to developmental delays as a consequence of exposure to domestic violence
- **Low self-esteem** due to feelings of shame and lack of self-efficacy
- **Poor academic performance** due to preoccupation regarding the abuse
- **Aggression and acting out behavior** (especially boys) mimicking the abusive behavior the child sees
- **Poor conflict resolution skills** as a result of not learning these skills from ones parents
- **Withdrawn and passive** (especially girls) due to a sense of hopelessness and fear
- **Substance abuse** in an attempt to self-medicate feelings of depression, anxiety and anger
- **Eating disorders** such as overeating, craving comfort foods, restricting what he/she will eat (anorexia*) and purging after eating (bulimia*)

*in adolescents

Children cannot protect themselves from exposure to domestic violence thus, it is particularly important to seek assistance for them. For a list of resources to help victims of domestic violence and their children see the section titled “Domestic Violence Community Resources” or call FOR Families at (949) 724-6650 for assistance.

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Difficulty leaving an abusive relationship is further compounded by learned helplessness, which is developed when the victim is repeatedly unable to escape the abuse. When learned helplessness occurs, victims are much more likely to refuse help and accept future violence as inescapable. This is true even when presented with real options to avoid future violence.

Survival Story

There are many survivors of domestic violence. One such case is Jan who, after many years of emotional abuse by her husband, Bob, and several attempts to leave him, successfully ended her relationship with him. Initially Jan was in denial about the abuse, believing if she did not have bruises and broken bones it was not domestic violence. It was very hard for her to break through her denial and finally really see that the verbal attacks were abuse and that they were not going to end but get worse, as they had over the 10 years she had been with Bob.

Bob blamed all his problems on Jan, belittled her and was extremely jealous, frequently accusing her of soliciting attention from other men. Over years of abuse, Jan became very anxious and depressed, she found herself believing the terrible things Bob said about her and she lost her self-esteem.

Jan had tried to leave Bob many times but was scared, scared about how she was going to support herself and her son, where she would live, how she would get a job after being out of the labor force for over 10 years and who would help her. She was afraid she would lose her son because her husband told her if she ever left him he would take her to court get custody of their son. One day, after a particularly brutal night with her husband, Jan's son asked her why daddy was so angry and was it his fault. It was at that moment that Jan realized the abuse was not just

hurting her, it was hurting her son. (See the section titled "Kids Hurt Too" to learn more about the effects of domestic violence on children.)



Jan called FOR Families and received assistance getting into a domestic violence shelter. Jan has now left the shelter and is working and caring for her son. She explained that leaving her husband was the hardest thing she had ever done and that she was terrified to do it but now that she is away from the abuse she sees how distorted her thinking had become. Being on her own has not been easy and Jan has had to make many sacrifices but feels that "having my life depended on it".

Victims do break free and live meaningful, happy lives. To learn more about resources to help victims of domestic violence see the section titled "Domestic Violence Community Resources" or call FOR Families at (949) 724-6650 for assistance.

You can be free.
