

# Domestic Violence Myths and Facts

**Instructions:** Test your knowledge of myths and facts regarding domestic violence. Determine if the statement is a myth or a fact.

## **1. Men of all socioeconomic classes and races abuse women.**

**FACT:** Domestic violence is a problem regardless of race, socioeconomic class and geographic location. In rural areas, physical isolation makes it easier for the abuser to hide the crime and more difficult for the victim to access resources. It is a problem in poor families and it also occurs in middle class and wealthy families. Victims with greater economic resources may not access services due to shame and fear of lost social and financial standing.

## **2. The level of violence in battering relationships escalates over time.**

**FACT:** Assaults become more intense, frequent and prolonged over time. Research indicates that 22-35% of emergency room visits by women are related to domestic violence. The FBI reports that spousal murders account for one-eighth of all homicides in the U.S.

## **3. Batterers are out of control.**

**MYTH:** The batterer *selectively* targets his or her partner, and in many cases, the children. People in the batterer's professional and social life are very rarely the victims of his or her violence; this indicates control over actions. Many batterers plan their attacks, selecting the time and place, while others choose which parts of the body to batter. By claiming to be "out of control," they are actively avoiding responsibility for their actions.

## **4. Alcohol or drugs cause battering.**

**MYTH:** Alcohol is involved in about one-half of all battering situations, but it is *not* the cause. At most, alcohol or other drugs may aggravate a pre-existing situation. Batterers often use substance abuse as an excuse to be out of control or to claim that they are unable to remember their actions. In reality, no causative relationship has ever been demonstrated between alcohol or drug use and violence. In fact, many alcoholics and drug users are non-violent, while many batterers do not use legal or controlled substances. Battering does not usually stop when the abuser achieves sobriety. Some battered women turn to drugs or alcohol as a method of dealing with or escaping the pain and horror of the abuse.

## **5. Men who batter cannot cope with stress or express anger properly.**

**MYTH:** Men who batter do so to gain and maintain control over their partners. Abuse is not precipitated by stress or anger. Batterers generally do not lash out at their bosses, co-workers, friends or others who aggravate or anger them.

## **6. Battered women are codependent.**

**MYTH:** Battered women do not in any way contribute to the abuse; they can neither control nor prevent the batterer's behavior. Lack of self-esteem and a need to please are direct results of victimization, not its causes. A woman does not enable the batterer to abuse her by remaining in the relationship. Battered women report that abuse happens regardless of their actions. Moreover, batterers usually abuse *any* woman with whom they have a relationship.

**7. Battered women often try to placate, accommodate and please their abusers.**

**FACT:** To do so, they often drastically modify their lives. Battered women do not provoke abuse. Batterers use any incident, regardless of its relevancy to the relationship, as an excuse for violence. The concept of provocation blames the *victim* for the batterer's behavior, absolving him of responsibility for actions which only he can control. Battered women are not perfect. However, a woman's angry outburst does not cause or justify the abuser's violence in any way.

**8. Historically, battered women have been misdiagnosed as mentally imbalanced or unstable.**

**FACT:** Many have received unnecessary medication that further hindered their ability to cope. In reality, battered women are reacting to the relentless, high-level stress brought on by an external problem. Once they achieve safety, they are able to function in a more relaxed manner.

**9. Battered women do not volunteer information about the abuse.**

**FACT:** Battered women typically do not volunteer information. However, a woman will often respond to direct questions when workers actively demonstrate interest and concern for her well-being. Without some form of intervention, battered women will continue to return with injuries or somatic complaints, some of which will increase in severity. It is more effective to confront the problem as early as possible, and not believe that a battered woman will tell someone if she wants to. Many women say they would never have had the courage to tell if they had not been asked about the abuse.

**10. Women assaulted by their partners usually confide in a friend or law enforcement about the abuse.**

**MYTH:** Battered women do not usually disclose until they realize the violence is intentional and escalating into a potentially life-threatening situation. Some are ashamed because they have come to accept the blame for the abuse; some want to protect their abusers and some hope the situation will improve. Most will talk about the violence if they are physically and emotionally safe with the person interviewing them. Many women won't discuss abuse in front of their children.

**11. Battering is a relationship problem best dealt with in couples counseling.**

**MYTH:** Battering is an attitude problem – the abuser believes he is superior to women, entitled to their obedience and justified in using physical force and intimidation to get his way. Because of the relationship's power imbalance, couples counseling is unfair, dangerous to the victim, and based on the faulty assumption that both individuals are responsible for the abuse. Further, it creates a false sense of safety when, in reality, any attempt by the woman to freely discuss the problem in the batterer's presence places her at risk of retaliatory violence.