

What is Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence?

Domestic violence and abuse, also called *intimate partner violence*, is a term for one person purposely causing either physical or mental harm to another, including

- Physical abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse
- Sexual assault
- Isolation
- Controlling all of the victim's money, shelter, time, food, etc.

Often, the violent person is a husband, former husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend, but sometimes the abuser is female. Domestic violence and abuse are common and must be taken very seriously.

One in four women report that they have been physically assaulted or raped by an intimate partner, according to the most recent U.S. Department of Justice's *National Violence Against Women Survey*. These crimes occur in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Physical and emotional trauma can lead to increased stress, depression, lowered self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress disorder (an emotional state of discomfort and stress connected to the memories of a disturbing event).

Violence against women by anyone is always wrong, whether the abuser is a current or past spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, someone you date, a family member, an acquaintance, or a stranger. You are not at fault. You did not cause the abuse to happen, and you are not responsible for the violent behavior of someone else.

If you or someone you know has been a victim of intimate partner violence, seek help from family members, friends, or community organizations. An important part of getting help is first knowing that you are in an abusive relationship. It can be hard to admit you're in an abusive relationship. But, there are clear signs to help you know if you are being abused.

Violence in Same-Sex Relationships

Domestic abuse occurs just as often in same-sex relationships as in heterosexual relationships. If you're in a same-sex relationship and you're being abused, you may be afraid to seek help for many of the same reasons as women in heterosexual relationships. You may worry about supporting yourself financially, or you may be concerned that your partner will seriously harm you or your children if you leave. But you probably have other concerns too. You may be wondering if anyone will believe you. And you may worry that the people you go to for help will be homophobic.

If you need help, call a local shelter and ask what kind of services they offer gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) clients. If you're not satisfied with the answer, call a shelter in the nearest big city. If you can't find a GLBT-friendly shelter, you can still seek help at a shelter. You do not have to tell them you are in a same-sex relationship if you don't want to. All they need to know is that you are a victim of domestic violence.

Older women face unique challenges.

Women of all ages are at risk for domestic and intimate partner violence and face similar challenges when trying to leave an abuser, like feelings of shame and money concerns. However, women who are 55 years and older and are abused face unique challenges. These women grew up and married during a time when domestic abuse was often ignored. Now, at an older age, they have endured many years of abuse and may have problems with poor self-image and shame. Older women who have been abused also are less likely to tell anyone about it, have health problems that keep them dependent on their abusive partner, feel committed to caring for their abusive aging partners, and are fearful of being alone.

There are resources for all women to get help. Call the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life through the Wisconsin Coalition at (608) 255-0539.

Why Women Don't Leave

Most people who have never been in an abusive relationship wonder, "Why doesn't she just leave?" There are many reasons why a woman may not leave an abusive relationship. She may have little or no money and have no way to support herself and her children. She may reach out for help only to find that all the local domestic violence shelters are full. She may not be able to contact friends and family who could help her. Or she may worry about the safety of herself and her children if she leaves.

If you're a victim of abuse or violence at the hands of someone you know or love or you are recovering from an assault by a stranger, you are not alone. Get immediate help and support.

The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **(800) 799-SAFE (7233)** and **(800) 787-3224 (TTY)**. Spanish speakers are available. When you call, you will first hear a recording and may have to hold. Hotline staff offers crisis intervention and referrals. If requested, they connect women to shelters and can send out written information.

The **National Sexual Assault Hotline** can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **(800) 656-HOPE (4673)**. When you call, you will hear a menu and can choose #1 to talk to a counselor. You will then be connected to a counselor in your area who can help you.

Anthem EAP

888-441-8674

www.anthem.com/eap/verizon

The National Women's Health Information Center, Office on Women's Health. (Updated 2009, January 15). *Domestic and intimate partner violence*. Retrieved November 4, 2010, from <http://www.womenshealth.gov/>

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