

Myth about VIOLENCE

Myth: *Women who are assaulted often like it.*

Women do not find pleasure in abuse. In fact, women are terrified, horrified, and disgusted when their partners turn on them. The "masochist" label (someone who derives pleasure from pain) is often used in an irresponsible manner by uninformed people to explain the assaulted woman's dilemma. Although women often return to an abusive partner, it is not violence that they are returning to, but the hope that it has stopped. Applying this label to assaulted women demeaning and disrespectful and is one more way to blame the victim.

Myth: *Women who stay in abusive relationships do so because they don't mind being assaulted.*

Women remain in abusive relationships for many reasons. Some are committed to their marriages and desperately want them to be successful. They want the children to grow up with their father and feel responsible for keeping the family together. They also hope he (the abuser) will change.

Myth: *Violence against women and children is embarrassing but is not really dangerous to the victim*

Wife assault causes serious and sometimes permanent damage. Two out of three woman who experience physical violence suffer injuries. The injuries range from bruises and body aches, to open wounds, broken teeth, broken bones and in the extreme, death.

Myth: *Violence against women is common only among the poor and working class people.*

There is no proof of this. Research has shown that abusers come from all walks of life and from all backgrounds: rich, poor, educated, uneducated, rural and urban. There are no expectations. In the same way, victims of violence come from all backgrounds. However, violence in upper classes is more likely to be hidden from public scrutiny because these women may have more to lose by exposing their situation.

Myth: *Men who beat their wives and children only do so when they are overtaken by aggression – it is not a common occurrence.*

Wife assault is rarely an isolated incident. One study showed women being beaten as many as 35 times before their contact with the Police. In a Gender Centre study, one third of women in Ghana admitted living with the abuse for years before reporting.

Myth: *Men commit sex crimes because they do not have enough sex.*

Men who commit sex crimes do not have any more "hormones" or sex drive than others. Often these men have sexual partners; the reasons for the crime are not solely for sex.

Myth: *All sexual abuse hurts physically.*

Some sexual abuse may be "gentle," and therefore not hurt physically. This does not mean it is not sexual abuse. Often there is severe emotional and psychological damage. When a victim experiences pleasure, particularly in cases of incest, they may feel guilty. When sexual boundaries are violated within the family, there is confusion in the area of sexuality and other relationships.

Myth: *Sex is a man's right in marriage; he will look for it elsewhere if you deny him sex.*

Society has granted permission for men to see sex as their right in marriage. However, sex in marriage is a matter of mutual consent.

Myth: *Violence against women shows your love.*

Men beat their wives to show control, it is not a sign of love. Violence shows disrespect and degradation and the highest contempt for another human being. It speaks about the unequal status in the relationship.

Myth: *Violence against women is a recent phenomenon.*

Violence against women is not a recent phenomenon. Recent publicity may lead you to think it is on the rise, but in fact it has always been a hidden part of our community. Women, angry and tired of being victimized, are demanding that it become a public issue, a social problem in need of remedy.

Myth: *Sexual assault is committed by strangers.*

In Ghana, studies have shown that over ninety percent of victims know the person who sexually assaulted them. They may be acquaintances, someone they recognize or close friends or relatives.

Myth: *Rape is the victim's fault.*

Rape is not the victim's fault. An offender may say a victim asked for it because of how they looked or acted. Unfortunately it is not only the offenders who believe this myth, but also much of the general public. Such statements as: "she wasn't wearing much," "she was drinking," "she did agree to go out with him," and "well, everybody knows what kind of girl she is," indicate that the blame is being placed on the victim and not the offender. Very often victims feel as if the assault was their fault and that had they done something different it might not have happened. The self-blame victims go through can be very damaging and have long term effects on their life and relationships. Victims should be given support and reinforcement that they did nothing wrong and that it wasn't their fault. Even if the victim was doing something risky, such as asking for a lift, she did not ask to be sexually assaulted.

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What is Violence Against Women (VAW)?

Violence and the threat of violence is a fear that is experienced by every woman – irrespective of age, skin colour, religion, economic or social status. It can happen anywhere, on the streets at the workplace, in the house.

It is different from other kinds of violence because it is targeted at women because of the inequality of position between men and women in society. It can take many forms, such as domestic violence, rape or sexual harassment. Violence against women is not only physical violence. It can be economic, psychological or traditional.

Some examples

- On the streets, snatch thieves target women.
- At the workplace, sexual harassment is often targeted at women.
- At home women can be battered and abused by their partner
- Incestuous rape occurs in the "Safety" of the home.
- Husbands can deny wives money to buy food.
- Girls can be circumcised as part of traditional customs.
- Husbands may threaten to stop paying children's school fees in order to hurt their wives.

What causes Violence against Women?

The problem of VAW lies in the inequality of status between men and women in society. Positions of power in politics, economics and religion are still dominated by men even though women make up more than half the population.

Our culture and most religions put women at an unequal position – their social status, quality of living and economic well-being are often dependent on or controlled by men.

Women's subordinate positions make them more vulnerable to violence. VAW is an expression of the power of men over women.

Who experiences violence?

Sadly, all women can experience violence. It happens to women from six months old to 93 years old. It happens to mentally ill and the disabled women. VAW happens irrespective of age, race, colour, religion, social or economic status. It has become an unfortunate factor in our society that all women can be targets of violence.

Who are the perpetrators?

They can be strangers, or a family member like her own husband, or even her father, brother, or uncle. It can be someone she knows intimately, like her boyfriend, or someone she trusts, like a friend or colleague.

Facts about Violence against Women. In the National study on Violence Against Women and Children carried out by the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre in 1998, the following emerged:

- 1 in 3 women were experiencing physical violence (beating, slapping or other physical punishment) at the hands of current or previous partners.
- 2 in 5 women are harassed or coerced when they refuse their partner sex.
- 3 in 10 women are forced by their male partner to have sex sometimes.
- 1 in 10 women earnings taken away from them.
- 1 in 10 women forced to leave the house in which they were living, either with or without children.
- 1 in 4 women intentionally humiliated or shamed in front of others.
- 1 in 4 women had been abused by a male partner's refusing to provide money and foodstuffs.
- 27% of women have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime.
- For 2 in 10 women their first experience of sex was against their will.
- 4% of women had been threatened with demands for sex before being offered a job or having a favour done.
- 6% of women had been threatened by a school teacher or principal that schooling would suffer if they did not have sex.
- 2 in 4 male partner's used abusive words as a form of abuse.
- 9 in 10 women are known to their abuser.

Some Myths about Violence against Women

Myth: *Alcohol is the real culprit in violence against women and children.*

Alcohol and drugs can make abuse worse, but they do not cause abuse. Rather, it justifies the use of physical force by allowing the offender to abdicate responsibility for his behaviour. Some men become intoxicated in order to act out their violent wishes.

Myth: *Men who beat their wives are mentally ill.*

Violence against women is too widespread to be explained away by mental illness. Most men who assault their wives confine it to the privacy of their home. The abuse is often directed to particular parts of the body that will not visibly bruise or is covered; obvious restraint and forethought is necessary to accomplish this. Violent husbands are not likely to attack their bosses or any member of the public because they are frustrated. If the man was truly ill, he would lack the ability to be selective in his targets and controlled in his administration of abuse.

Myth: *Women who are assaulted are usually asking for it.*

No woman ever deserves to be beaten, regardless of the kind of person she is. Provocation is an excuse the offender uses to avoid responsibility for his own behaviour. Many people support his view by examining the victim's behaviour or personality for clues as to the cause of the abuse. Excuse-making perpetuates the use of violence as an acceptable method of problem-solving and leads the offender to believe he is justified in using force to get his own way.