



MYTHS

REGARDING DOMESTIC & INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a public health issue affecting families worldwide. It is also a crisis that affects many homes in Pakistan. According to the HRCP, over 90% of Pakistani women have faced domestic violence and abuse in one form or another during their lifetime.

This epidemic is such, that there are numerous myths and common misconceptions regarding domestic violence and abuse which further help perpetuate the cycle of abuse. Many of them have been passed down generations, with no real evidence.

Here are some of the common myths you may have heard - and the facts to counteract the same.

Myth 1: Domestic violence is a rare occurrence and only happens in poor, uneducated or minority families.

Fact: Domestic and intimate partner violence is a pervasive issue that can take place regardless of the socioeconomic background of the survivor and his/her family. There is no connection between domestic and intimate partner violence and a survivor's gender, religion, caste, creed, sexual orientation, culture or nationality.

Myth 2: Family violence only takes place because the woman deliberately provokes the man and causes him to lose patience / his temper.

Fact: This belief is based in deep-rooted misogyny and patriarchal family norms. The man is considered to be the head of the family, and is thus within his rights to punish his partner / spouse and the children, should they step outside of the boundaries he has placed for them; and if they act in ways that he does not approve of.

It is common for the abuser to blame the victim and refuse to take responsibility for their own actions. This tactic has been supported by society at large for many years, with the wider community often blaming women for male violence.

This is also known as "victim blaming". It can lead the survivor (regardless of gender) to blame themselves for whatever happens, as they are constantly told that the violence that happens to them is their fault.

Myth 3: If it's so bad - why doesn't he/she just leave?

Fact: Survivors may continue staying in abusive relationships due to a host of reasons. It's not because they are exaggerating the extent of the abuse. It can be very difficult to leave a domestically violent situation. Statistically, women are at a higher risk of extreme violence (including homicide / murder) after leaving the abuser. They may continue to stay because they are legitimately *afraid* for their own lives - and those of their children. Another common reason is that the survivor may have nowhere to go or may be economically dependent upon the abuser. He/she may even still have a strong sense of attachment to the abuser, and they may believe the abuser whenever he/she promises to change; making it difficult for them to sever that (many times codependent) bond.

Myth 4: He/she doesn't hit him/her! How can it be abuse then?

Fact: Domestic and intimate partner violence is not just physical. It may include violence that is emotional, psychological, sexual, coercive, technology-facilitated, economic and verbal;; among others. Just because you cannot see the bruises on the survivor, does not mean that the violence is not there in the relationship.

Myth 5: This is a private family matter. Let it be. Why make an issue out of it?

Fact: Domestic and intimate partner violence and abuse incur a huge cost for the society - both economically and psychologically. This includes the cost of necessary medical treatments after abuse and any court proceedings that may result. Additionally, the generational trauma that is passed down in many families as a result of the widespread acceptance of said abuse has caused much damage to society as a whole. It is not "just a family matter".

Myth 6: Children are not really affected by family violence. As long as the parents stay together, that's all that matters.

Fact: When a child(s) sees one parents acting violently towards another (this does not just include physical violence), and when they grow up in an unpredictable environment, fear-filled environment, it can have a detrimental impact upon their mental health and wellbeing. Studies have shown that such children are at a greater risk of developing depression and suffering from behavioral issues. They may exhibit bed wetting, sleep disorders, violence towards other children, stuttering and bouts of crying. They may even have difficulty in school. This includes developing poor reading skills and struggling to maintain friendships and other intimate relationships. Sometimes, they may even begin to identify with the aggressor and lose respect for the survivor.

Myth 7: Violent men (and women) come from violent homes.

Fact: This is not entirely true. Perpetrators of violence can come from any type of home. The relationship between exposure to violence during childhood and becoming an adult perpetrator of said violence is complex. Many men come from very abusive households but are extremely gentle towards women and children. It is important to remember that at the heart of the matter, committing violence is always a choice.

Myth 8: Women exaggerate how bad the abuse is to gain sympathy.

Fact: Nearly 80% of the claims of domestic violence are based in fact. Most survivors do not contact the police or other emergency services when faced with intimate partner or domestic violence. In fact, they are more likely to *downplay* the violence and shrug off any queries regarding obvious signs (such as injuries or scars) when talking to family, friends or well-wishers.

However, many abusers and their enablers use this myth to damage claims of abuse made by survivors.

Myth 9: Women are just as abusive as men.

Fact: While this may not be true for a 100% of the cases, in a vast majority of domestic abuse cases, the survivors are women and the perpetrators are men. It is a gendered-crime that is deeply rooted in misogyny, which is further perpetuated as a result of patriarchal norms and the stark inequalities between men and women in society.

Myth 10: Domestic abuse and intimate partner violence result from a “loss of control”. It is called a “crime of passion” for a reason, right?

Fact: Domestic violence is more about establishing control than losing it. Abusers rarely act spontaneously when angry. They consciously choose when to abuse their partner and it is usually when they are alone with the survivor or when they know that those around them will not help the survivor. The abuser is always working to maintain control.

Myth 11: Religious people do not perpetrate abuse and are also not victims of abuse.

Fact: There is no proof that such statements are true. Whether they are part of the clergy, or even leaders from among the community - they can be abusers and may also be victims to abuse themselves. However, many victims hesitate to come forward to ask for help due to religious beliefs that may encourage them to keep the family together at all costs.

Myth 12: Abusers will stop the violence once they are married.

Fact: In fact, statistics show that an abuser's suspicions and possessiveness increase after marriage. Their attacks will also become increasingly more frequent.

Myth 13: All couples argue. It's just a normal relationship.

Fact: There is a difference between a disagreement and abuse. Differences of opinion are welcomed in healthy relationships. Living with an abuser leaves the survivor no room for disagreement or even any discussion between equals, as abuse is the use of physical, sexual, economic and / psychological violence or threats in order to control the other person's thinking, emotions and behavior.

Myth 14: Both parties hold some responsibility towards the relationship going south.

Fact: Once again, there is no proof that such statements hold any truth. Abusers frequently tell survivors that they resorted to violence because of something the victim / survivor did - she / he was rude, nagging or made the abuser angry. The reality is that there is no "reason" nor justification for resorting to violence. These are all excuses, not explanations.

Myth 15: People who commit intimate partner violence are usually violent in most of their relationships.

Fact: Abusers are often the most kindest and sweetest people you will ever meet. They may be seen as highly professional within their circles and may be extremely popular and hold a position of respect. It is quite common for abusers to show a very different (violent and abusive) side to their partners from the ones they portray to society at large. This is also known as the "Jekyll and Hyde" factor.

Myth 16: You should go and rescue your friends; who are in such relationships.

Fact: While you may be tempted to act as "savior", remember that you cannot save everyone. This is the cold, hard truth. You cannot pull someone out of such a situation if they themselves do not / cannot leave. What you can do, however, is to be a source of support for them. Do not lose patience, or hope. Do not give up if the survivor returns to the abuser - this is a normal occurrence in abusive relationships, and must not be seen as a sign that your efforts are hopeless. The survivor may even start to cut people off (especially those who continue to badger him/her to leave). Do not be disheartened and continue to offer support and be non-judgmental. You can take breaks from contact if it is starting to fatigue you and adversely affect your health. You have to be smart when supporting your friend until he/she is ready to leave.

Myth 17: An abuser cannot be a loving partner.

Fact: There may be periods in the relationship where the abuser is very kind, considerate and loving towards the survivor. The survivor knows that their partner / spouse is capable of being loving towards them. This is why many hold on to the hope that the abuser will ultimately change. Unfortunately, this is a ploy and the abuser will choose to abuse or treat the survivor with kindness depending on their own mood and what they need from the survivor. Sometimes, abusers will suddenly begin to show kindness and generosity because they want to regain control over the survivor and prevent them from leaving the relationship.

Myth 18: Domestic violence is a one-time event.

Fact: Domestic and intimate partner violence is a pattern of abusive behavior, which takes place over time and at different instances during the relationship. It may even start to escalate in severity each time the violence occurs.

Myth 19: There is no correlation between animal abuse and domestic violence.

Fact: The use of abuse, or the threat of the same, against companion animals is a much-used tactic in domestic violence. It is an effective method of leveraging control over the survivor, and /or to keep others in the family in line or silent. It is estimated that 88% of pets that live in abusive households are abused or simply killed. Of all the women who seek shelter from abusive relationships, 57% have an animal / pet in tow.

Myth 20: Abusers and survivors have low self-esteem.

Fact: Abusers *do not* have low self-esteem. In fact, they believe that they are entitled to lauding power and control over the survivor (and other family members). Abusers may pretend to have low self-esteem, if it makes others believe that the violence is not their fault.

On the other hand, survivors may start out with having high self-esteem in abusive relationships; that is gradually destroyed by the abuser. Some abusers even look for individuals with low self-esteem to target; as they believe that the victim will be more likely to blame him/herself and be less likely to report the abuser's behavior.

Other abusers may seek out individuals with high self-esteem, as they may represent a greater challenge for the abuser to control over time.

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Pakistan's Digital Domestic Violence Resource Centre

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