



Myths and Realities About Domestic Violence

Running Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Flipchart with stand and markers, or chalkboard with chalk.

Handout: Myths and Realities About Domestic Violence.

Target audience: Can be used for awareness-raising with various audiences.

Introduction:

Facilitator: Efforts to combat domestic violence can sometimes be hindered by myths about domestic violence. These myths develop in part because it can be difficult to understand why one person would hurt another, particularly in the context of an intimate relationship. Myths provide erroneous information about why domestic violence happens, and many of these myths are common throughout the world. Understanding these myths and the realities of domestic violence is critical to developing effective strategies for combating domestic violence. In addition, because many of these myths are so widely held, it is important to learn how to address these myths when we encounter them as we educate and train others about domestic violence. This session will focus on these common myths about and the realities of domestic violence.

Learning Objectives:

Facilitator: At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify common myths about domestic violence.
- Confront these myths in their work and everyday lives.

Activity: Common Myths About Domestic Violence

1. Facilitator will read each statement below aloud and ask the participants to decide whether these statements are true or false. Participants should be encouraged to share their experiences and perceptions about each statement. At the end of the discussion about each statement, the presenter can read the answer aloud. At the conclusion of the presentation, the participants can be given a [Handout](#) on myths and realities of domestic violence.

Statement: Domestic violence is due to poverty or lack of education.

Answer: False. Domestic violence is common throughout all levels of society, whether rich or poor. It is often easier to keep the violence hidden when a person has money and important friends, but it happens nonetheless. There is no evidence to support the idea that uneducated or poor people are more likely to abuse their wives or partners than are more educated and affluent people.

Statement: Alcohol and drug use is a major cause of domestic violence.

Answer: False. Although alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence, they do not cause the violence. Many men who beat their wives do not drink. Men who drink and beat their wives usually do not beat random people on the street, their parents or their bosses. They direct their violence only at their wives. Men who batter their wives often continue to do so even after they stop drinking. An abuser may use alcohol as an excuse for the violence, or alcohol may prevent him from realizing the level of force he is using, but alcohol is not the cause. Domestic violence and substance abuse must be understood and treated as independent problems.

Statement: A battered woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in a violent relationship.
Answer: True. There are many social, economic and cultural reasons a woman might choose to stay in an abusive relationship. These reasons are rational. Often, there is no place for her to go. She may not have a way to support herself or her children if she leaves, feel embarrassed or humiliated about the abuse, or fear that her friends, family and community will blame her for the abuse. She may be reluctant to leave for emotional or religious reasons. In addition, leaving entails substantial risks. She may fear that a batterer will carry out threats to harm her, himself the children, friends or family. Battered women are in the greatest danger of severe or even lethal attacks when they attempt to leave, and she is the only one who can judge when it is safe for her to do so.

Statement: A battered woman leaves her husband many times.
Answer: True. Contrary to theories of domestic violence that portray battered women as helpless, most women surviving in abusive relationships leave many times and routinely act in conscious ways to try to minimize the abuse directed at them and to protect their children.

Statement: Men are victims of domestic violence as often as women are.
Answer: False. Research shows that women are victims in 95% of domestic violence cases. To the extent women do use violence, it is generally in self-defense. Reports of violence against men are often exaggerated because abusers will accuse their partners of using violence as a way to avoid or minimize their own responsibility. In addition, men who do experience domestic violence have more access to resources to leave violent situations than do women.

Statement: Everyone knows a victim of domestic violence.
Answer: True. We all know victims. Worldwide, between one quarter and one half of all women experience violence in an intimate relationship. Victims of domestic violence may not disclose the abuse because of embarrassment or humiliation, fear that they will be blamed for the abuse, or the danger of retaliation from the abuser.

Statement: Men who abuse are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration.
Answer: False. Domestic violence is intentional conduct, and batterers are not out of control. Their violence is carefully targeted to certain people at certain times and places. They generally do not attack their bosses or people on the streets, no matter how angry they may be. Abusers also follow their own internal rules about abusive behaviors. They often choose to abuse their partners only in private, or may take steps to ensure that they do not leave visible evidence of the abuse. Batterers also chose their tactics carefully—some destroy property, some rely on threats of abuse, and some threaten children. Studies also indicate that in fact, some batterers become more controlled and calm as their aggressiveness increases.

Statement: Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote rural areas.
Answer: False. Domestic violence has been documented in both rural and urban areas. Domestic violence is a problem everywhere.

❖ *Allow time for questions after distribution of the handout.*

2. Facilitator leads a brainstorming session about domestic violence myths. The questions for discussion include:
 - Are there other common myths about domestic violence that you know of?
 - What do these myths assume about the causes of domestic violence?

- ❖ *Write down participants' ideas as they are offered on a flipchart or chalkboard.*

During the guided discussion, the facilitator should revisit relevant parts of the answers to the statements above and also highlight the following ideas:

- Myths about domestic violence develop in part because it can be difficult to understand why one person would hurt another, particularly in the context of an intimate relationship.
- Myths about domestic violence generally blame the victim or some other factor, such as alcohol or anger, for the violence. As a result, these myths divert attention from the actions of the abuser. Domestic violence, however, is intentional conduct. It is critical that all responses to domestic violence share a common understanding of domestic violence and focus on abuser's actions.
- Understanding the myths and realities of domestic violence can help us focus on the responsibility of the abuser. This focus on the responsibility of the abuser is a critical part of any effective strategy for protecting victims and holding batterers accountable.

Summary and Closing:

Facilitator closes, emphasizing the following ideas:

- There are many myths about domestic violence. In explaining the cause of domestic violence, the myths generally focus on blaming the victim or some other factor, such as alcohol, anger or a lack of education. As a result, these myths obscure the batterer's responsibility for his actions.
- Domestic violence is intentional conduct that is designed to gain power and control over another. A batterer uses violence or the threat of violence, reinforced by other manipulative and coercive tactics, to ensure that his wife behaves in certain ways.
- Because there are many reasons a battered woman may want or need to stay in a relationship, it may be useful to think of ways that the legal system can be changed to help women protect themselves while allowing them the freedom to say in the relationship. In the United States, for example, civil orders for protection were developed to allow for court intervention in violent situations without forcing women to seek a divorce or pursue criminal proceedings.
- A focus on the responsibility of the abuser is a critical part of any effective strategy for protecting victims and holding batterers accountable. In addition, because many of these myths are so widely held, it is important to learn how to address these myths when we encounter them as we educate and train others about domestic violence.

Questions and Comments:

Facilitator should end the session by asking if there are remaining questions or comments related to this material. Keeping track of feedback will allow the facilitator to make changes to future presentations.

Sources:

Alcohol Abuse and Domestic Violence, Women's Rural Advocacy Program, available at <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/alcohol.htm>.

Battering: The Facts, Women's Rural Advocacy Program, available at <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/myths.htm>.

The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls, Charlotte Bunch, in *The Progress of Nations 45*, UNICEF 1997, available at <http://www.unicef.org/pubsgen/pon97/pon97.pdf> (PDF) and <http://www.unicef.org/pon97/> (web).

Myths and Facts about Domestic Violence, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, available at http://www.ocadsv.com/myths_and_facts.html.

Substance Abuse and Woman Abuse by Male Partners, Larry W. Bennett, 1997, available at <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/finaldocuments/Vawnet/substanc.htm>.

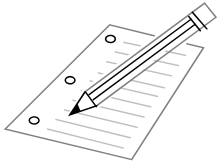
Why Women Stay: The Barriers to Leaving, Women's Rural Advocacy Program, available at <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/whystay.htm>.

Women, Violence and Social Change, R. Emerson Dobash & Russel P. Dobash, 229-32, 1992.

Additional Resources:

Domestic Violence: Explore the Issue, available at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/domestic/explore/3causes.htm>.

Issue in Depth: Alcohol and Domestic Violence, available at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/domestic/link/alcohol.htm>.



HANDOUT

Myths and Realities About Domestic Violence

- Statement:** Domestic violence is due to poverty or lack of education.
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Battering: The Facts, Women's Rural Advocacy Program, available at <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/myths.htm>.

The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls, Charlotte Bunch, in *The Progress of Nations* 45, UNICEF 1997, available at <http://www.unicef.org/pubsgen/pon97/pon97.pdf> (PDF) and <http://www.unicef.org/pon97/> (web).

Myths and Facts about Domestic Violence, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, available at http://www.ocadsv.com/myths_and_facts.html.

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