



Understanding Domestic Abuse

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Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is an act or a series of acts of abuse committed by one family member against another family member. It is a pattern of behaviour to gain or retain power and control over the other party. It is any action or threat of action that harms another person. Such conducts include frightening and intimidating others as well as manipulating them. Any ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender is susceptible to abuse. One of the common types of abuse is intimate partner violence (IPV) which happens in a marriage, cohabitation, or dating situations and it can impact people from all walks of life (United Nations, n.d.).



Types of domestic abuse

Generally there are five types of abuse - physical, emotional, sexual, financial and social. Physical abuse involves perpetrators kicking, punching, slapping or banging parts of their victims' body. Others include hair pulling, strangling and throwing objects at the victims. Most serious cases are assaulting and threatening with a knife or sharp objects. Emotional abuse happens when victims are neglected, name-called, threatened, belittled or humiliated. Another form of emotional abuse is controlling the spouse's salary. Sexual abuse occurs when husbands use forced sex even during pregnancy and menstruation. There are cases when husbands treat their wives as sex objects, engaging in unwanted sexual practices such as using objects or forcing them to watch pornography and imitating the sexual acts. Some even video-record the whole process and using it to threaten and criticise their wives' sexual ability. Frequent sex and no family planning will result in unwanted pregnancy and sometimes, the wives are forced to go through abortions. Financial abuse happens when husbands fail to give monetary support to the family, having debt problems due to gambling or borrowing money from loan sharks under their wives' names and letting them face the consequences while the husbands escape. Social abuse is a behaviour when the wives are restricted from making friends or visiting her family. As a result, the women have no support system and are confined at home. Normally, victims of domestic abuse face a combination of these forms of abuse.

Causes of domestic abuse

Reasons cited for the domestic abuse by the victims are the perpetrators have problems in extramarital affairs, addiction (alcohol, drug, gambling), bad temper and jealousy. Stress and anger arise when the perpetrator cannot control himself. In reality, the root cause of domestic abuse is due to power and control by the perpetrator. This happens when the perpetrators are perceived to have more power over the victims. This happens in our society where it is largely male dominated and patriarchal, leading to the victims becoming submissive to the abuse.

Effects of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse victims face physical, psychological, financial, and social effects. Victims can be physically hurt due to fracture, wounds and injuries while some has to undergo forced abortion, suffer from sexually transmitting disease or infected by HIV. Some abused cases lead to fatality.

Long-term abuse can lead to psychological effects such as loss of self-confidence and low self-esteem, feeling worthless, losing hope, experiencing mental illness, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms where they have frequent flashbacks and nightmares about the abusive incidents.

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Those facing financial abuse are constantly facing debt and mismanagement of money and are hit whenever they ask for money from their husbands. This is not only a loss to the family but also to the society when the victims have to frequently be on MCs or on unpaid leave which affects the productivity at the workplace.

When victims are socially isolated, they then lack the support from family and friends. In turn, they become very withdrawn, shameful and tend to isolate themselves. Children who witness abuse towards their mothers face behavioural issues at school. They become very aggressive and lose interest academically and eventually become dropouts.

Ways to help the victims of domestic abuse

It is important for service providers to explore the options that the victims may have after the abuse incident. Once the options have been explored, victims may decide on the actions that they wish to undertake. Among the available ones are the rights to get protection, the rights to make a police report, and the rights to get medical treatment at the hospital.

Seek medical treatment

Victims can seek medical assistance at One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) which is at the emergency and trauma department of the government hospital. It is advisable that the victims seek treatment immediately. The medical reports can be used as evidence in court.

Make a police report

Victims can also lodge police reports at the nearest police station or at the OSCC of the hospital. Once reports have been made the police can proceed with proper investigation on the incidents.

Pursue the case in court

After the investigation has been conducted, the police will submit the investigation report to the Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP). If there is sufficient evidence, the DPP will decide to charge the perpetrator in court.

Protection order

Under the Domestic Violence Act, victims can request for a protection order if they feel they are in danger. They can request for an interim protection order (IPO) while the case is being investigated. Using a referral letter from the police, the victim can go to the Social Welfare Department to apply for a protection order from the court. Besides that, she can seek support from some women support NGOs for a safe house. There are also emergency protection orders (EPO) and protection orders (PO) to protect the abused victims.

In some cases, the victims may go back to the perpetrator for several reasons such as she has forgiven him, she feels that their children will suffer if the couple divorces, or the victim is not financially independent. The victims have the right to pursue the case in whichever way they want without being forced. However, the police can intervene if the violence is obvious and dangerous.

Role of Women Centre for Change

The Women Centre for Change (WCC) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was established in 1985 to end violence against women and children. Originating from an office on the Penang island, it has expanded to the mainland with the establishment of Pusat Perkhidmatan Wanita/WCC Seberang in 2009 with the funding from the Penang state government. The objectives of WCC are to a) eliminate violence against women and children, b) empower women and children and c) promote gender equality and social justice.

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Services offered by WCC

There are various types of assistance offered by WCC to the general public. Among them are free and confidential services (counselling, temporary shelter, legal advice, victim support, hospital support) and empowering victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault to access justice for the cases. Outreach programmes are conducted to educate the public about matters related to raise awareness and prevent sexual abuse in society. WCC's school outreach programmes teach children and teenagers about personal safety on how to avoid being sexually exploited via programmes such as OK Tak OK Programme for Children and Cybersafety Programme for Teenagers. Community awareness talks engage community groups, corporations, NGOs, and government departments about domestic violence, child sexual abuse, gender sensitisation, and women's empowerment. Finally, WCC also undertakes advocacy work which involves supporting victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, engaging dialogues and meetings with related agencies, training stakeholders to sensitise them for a better understanding on the challenges encountered by domestic and sexual violence victims, lobbying for legislative and policy reforms to improve the rights of women and children.

Self-love can be difficult for abuse survivors. People who have been subjected to any form of abuse have been told by their abusers that they are not loved by anyone in either spoken or otherwise. It is natural to feel unlovable after hearing and believing in an opposing viewpoint. The unlovable emotion can inadvertently become a part of their identities. Victims should seek help from family, friends, or the professional community. The WCC can assist abused victims on their path to recovery.

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References

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