

Yemaya

Women's Support Service

Fact Sheet 1: The Cycle of Violence



All relationships are different and can include same-sex couples, heterosexual couples or sibling and family relationships. However, there is a pattern that tends to occur when violence is part of the way in which people interact with each other. This pattern has many variations, but after talking to women who are still in, or who have left abusive relationships, it is becoming clear that the underlying emotions are very similar for most of them. In heterosexual relationships, research shows it is usually the man in the relationship who tries to dominate.

THE BUILD-UP STAGE

In any relationship, there are times when tension builds up between the people involved. This is normal and many people can overcome it by talking it out or defusing it in some way that is acceptable to both parties.

In some relationships, this is not possible as one partner dominates the situation to the extent that the other feels under stress and begins to modify their behaviour extensively to placate the other partner. During this phase, there will be verbal, economic, social abuse or a combination of these evident. This build-up phase begins to merge into a much more frightening phase in which anxiety and tension in the family may reach quite debilitating proportions. We call this phase the Stand- Over Phase.

THE STAND OVER PHASE

This phase in the cycle of violence can be long or short. It seems the dominant partner is determined to control the actions of the family in general and/or his partner in particular and they, in turn are frightened to do anything which will precipitate the next stage in the cycle, in which there can be a violent outburst.

The Stand Over Phase is often a time women recall later as the phase in which they anticipated a violent outburst and they tried very hard to avoid or divert the anger of the partner. Many women describe it as a time when they 'walked on eggshells to try to keep the peace'. Yet, for some, this phase can become the usual way of life in the family. If the abuser can achieve sufficient control during this phase, some women have said that it is rare for an outburst to follow. This pattern may be breached after several turns of the cycle, when the memory of the violence is enough to control the



whole family. Just an occasional reminder of that will be enough to enforce compliance.

THE VIOLENT OUTBURST

Violence can take many forms for example, punching, slapping, kicking, stabbing, throttling, damaging objects, punching walls but may not always be physical. The outburst may involve extreme physical harm to the victim and can have long-lasting effects on the one being abused. The benefit to the abuser is a release of tension and the compliance of the victim.



THE PURSUIT PHASE

Often the abuser will express feelings of remorse or sorrow for what they have done. They may be frightened about their perceived lack of control over their violence and may be fearful that the partner will leave. They may attempt to recover ground by asking forgiveness, giving presents, making promises about the future and their behaviour. However, it is unlikely that the abuser has accepted responsibility for his behaviour and even more unlikely that he has changed.

Many abusers feel close to their partners after the violence and attempt to 'make it up' with them by 'making love'. The partner's reaction may be very different and many women say they did not want sexual contact with the person who has just abused them. Yet most will co-operate either through fear of more abuse or in an attempt to show that they are prepared to stay with the abuser, even though they have been hurt, perhaps severely. Consequently the closeness often displayed during this period is not felt equally by both partners.



THE HONEYMOON PHASE

Initially, both victim and abuser may believe that violence has entered their relationship almost accidentally and that given enough love from them both, it will not recur. This time after, the violence, when forgiveness has been sought and given, may be a time of great closeness for the couple, hence, the name, Honeymoon Phase. However, inevitably, given the usual problems of daily life, tensions will rise again. These tensions will gradually lead them back into the Build-up Phase and the cycle will begin again.

The effect of the cycle of violence on the rest of the family is severe. They will usually become isolated from outside activities that may interfere with the demands of the abuser and may show signs of chronic tension, anxiety and depression. Children exposed to this abuse are traumatised with the effects remaining well into adulthood.

