

Understanding the types of domestic violence

By Jennifer Marshall and Liliana E. Sanchez

After going over the different stages of the cycle of violence in yesterday's article, we begin to understand a bit more about the way in which abusive relationships work. Today, we are going to take a look at the abuser and try to understand the characteristics and tactics of those who batter.



Domestic violence and emotional abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other person. Partners may be married or not married, heterosexual, gay or lesbian, living together, separated or dating. Many men are in abusive relationships, however the most common victims of abuse are women and children. There are many tactics perpetrators of abuse use to gain and maintain power and control over their victims.

Types of abuse include physical, emotional, sexual, financial and verbal abuse as well as making threats, using children as a manipulation tool, intimidation, and isolation. The most widely known and most dangerous form of abuse is the physical form. Physical abuse can involve a range of tactics including pushing, dragging through the house, kicking, threatening with weapons, rape, pulling hair, and more. This type of abuse is often when the police and medical teams become involved.

Emotional abuse can involve the abuser embarrassing their partner in front of others, constant put-downs, forcing their victim to live in a home with drugs and alcohol, constant demand of their partner's time, suicide threats or attempts, unpredictable behavior, and the silent treatment.

Someone can also sexually abuse their partner by forcing

unwanted sex, making the person feel that it is their duty to have sex, forcing their partner to get pregnant, or physically harming the person if they do not have sex.

Abusers often control all of the family money and may not allow their partner to work or get an education, or on the other hand, will refuse to get a job.

Verbal along with emotional is the most common form of abuse and involves constant put-down by the abuser, the victim being told they are crazy, stupid, or lazy, the abuser using racial slurs, and even threatening to kill their victim. Many victims report that broken bones will heal, but verbal and emotional abuse leaves a more permanent scar.

Other common tactics of abuse include intimidation, isolation, and using the children as a form of control. Abusers may intimidate their victim through looks, actions, tone and volume of voice, and destroying property to instill fear in their partners. Isolation is common and can include controlling where their partner goes, excluding family members and friends, and not allowing their partner to get a driver license or use the vehicle.

During the winter months, South Lake Tahoe is an ideal spot for the isolation of victims as we receive hundreds of inches of snow per year. Victims without transportation may be trapped in their homes with their abusers for days at a time. Abusive partners may also make their victim feel guilty for having children and may use the children to deliver intimidating messages that continue the abuse even after a victim has left the relationship.

So, why does someone become abusive? It is important to realize that physically and psychologically abusing an intimate partner is not an issue of anger management, but a learned behavior or a choice that a person makes. For example, many abusers are able to manage their anger quite effectively

with friends and co-workers, and only use that anger in a negative way when they choose to batter their partner or their children. There is no definitive way to determine why some people are abusive and some are not, but there are common psychological and environmental characteristics and factors that increase a person's risk from becoming an abusive person.

Many batterers grew up in homes where they experienced or witnessed abuse themselves and never learned healthy ways to cope with everyday stresses. Many individuals feel that they never had any power or control over their own lives, and now finally, they can assert power over someone else. For some men who batter, physical and emotional abuse is often the result of a man's belief that women are an inferior gender. They see women's behavior as wrong, inappropriate, or even evil. With this belief, some men feel that it is necessary to control women, and will use violent and abusive actions to do so. This type of thought is generally not personal, but rather social and cultural. These social norms and beliefs do not force anyone to be abusive, but can explain the source from which the choice to abuse comes from.

As there are environmental factors that can lead to abusive behavior, there are also risk factors that can exacerbate abuse. Although many victims and batterers have substance abuse problems, there is no evidence that alcohol or drugs cause violent behaviors. An abusive person will batter their partner when they are intoxicated as well as when they are sober. Many times, alcohol and drugs are used as coping mechanisms for other problems that the batterer is dealing with such as depression, child sexual abuse, witnessing abuse as a child, and other psychological disorders.

While environmental and psychological factors can increase a person's risk for becoming abusive, it is very important to recognize that abusive behaviors are almost always a choice and therefore can be controlled. With that said, what can we do to decrease domestic violence in our community? Long-term

Batterer's Intervention Programs are available to address issues of abuse and work with male and female abusers to hold them accountable for their behaviors and allow them to recognize and change their behavior. We can work to reduce prejudice against women and batterers would be less able to justify the abuse to women and the community.

It is also important to provide unconditional support to victims throughout their relationship and if they decide to leave. We need to realize that it is possible to prevent abuse before it starts and can begin by respecting and valuing young boys and girls as equals as well as supporting young girls to increase their self-esteem and become powerful individuals.

For more information about domestic violence, prevention, and intervention programs, please contact the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center at (530) 544.2118. The Women's Center Business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

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