

# Myths About Domestic Violence

Here are some **false** beliefs, or myths, about battering and domestic violence. These myths are common in our society. The facts about domestic violence follow the myths. Click on the link below to view topic further down on page.

## Myths About Battering

**False** Battering is rare. Only some people experience it.

**True** Many battered women are afraid to tell anyone about the battering. Even fewer are reports of violence from men who batter. The 1998 Violence Against Women Survey found that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 13 men had experience rape and/or physical assault by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some point in her/his lifetime. The 1998 Commonwealth Fund Survey of Women's Health found that less than half of women who had experienced physical abuse by a domestic partner told anyone at all.

**False** Religious beliefs or practices will prevent battering. Battering does not occur within certain faiths.

**True** Individuals of all faiths and creeds can be batterers or victims of violence. Unfortunately, many religious communities are reluctant to admit that violence occurs within their congregations. This veil of secrecy and shame can prevent victims from coming forward and getting the support they deserve. It can also create a shield behind which the batterer can hide his abusive behavior.

**False** Battering will stop by itself over some period of time.

**True** Without intervention, battering will probably continue and become more severe over time. Many men who batter try to stop on their own but do not succeed. With the help of a comprehensive Batterer Intervention Program, batterers may be able to take responsibility for their abuse, learn how to resolve conflicts non-violently, and stop trying to control others. For more information about Batterer Intervention Programs in Virginia, call 1.800.838.8238 (v/tty).

**False** Battering is not dangerous or serious. It is no big deal.

**True** Battering is dangerous and serious. It is the most common way that women are murdered by men. It hurts women, the children, relationships, and the men who batter. It is a big problem which needs to end.

**False** Battering is the result of instinct. Men are aggressive from birth. They have a drive toward violent behavior.

**True** Abusive behavior is *learned*. There is much evidence that aggression is learned from role models. Experiencing or witnessing violence as a child is the most significant predictor of adult violence. There is little proof that people have an "instinct" for violence; however, boys are often trained to be rough and controlling.

## Myths About Men Who Batter

**False** Men who batter are very mean, scuzzy, and ugly “skid row” types. They hate everybody.

**True** All types of men can batter. Men who batter are often gentle, loving, neat, clean, and successful in many areas of their lives.

**False** Men who batter are violent in all of their relationships.

**True** Most men who batter are violent only at home. They are friendly and polite in public. At home, they fear fewer consequences and “dump” their anger into violence.

**False** Men who batter are always uneducated, “lower class” or working class, or poor. Men who batter are from minority groups, who do not know any better.

**True** Men who batter are from *all* groups in our country. Race, lack of education or wealth, and/or social background do not make men abusive.

**False** Only alcoholics and drug abusers are violent to women. Alcohol or drugs caused the violent behavior.

**True** Some men who batter also have problems with alcohol and drugs. They can quit using chemicals and still act abusively toward women. Alcohol and drug use is often an excuse for violent behavior. Some men who batter do not use any chemicals. Others are social users.

**False** Men who batter have no control over their violent behavior. They are brutal, evil psychopaths who lack morals. Men who batter cannot change.

**True** Men who batter may *feel* like they have no control over their behavior. However, they have total control over their violence. The “where, when, how, and why” of violent behavior involves *choice*. Most men who batter do not enjoy acting abusively. They do not lack morals or values. They are *not* evil or psychopathic. They have learned to make very poor choices that involve violent, abusive behavior. Men who batter can learn to make better choices. They can learn new skills to use instead of violence.

**False** Men who batter are physically brutal every day. Men who strike “only” once in a while, or “just” slap are not men who batter.

**True** Most men who batter do not beat up their partners every day. Physical attacks may be more or less frequent and dangerous, but abuse is abuse. Men who batter usually act in other controlling and intimidating ways (psychological abuse) often. Dominating and intimidating behavior is probably the “abuse of choice” for most men who batter.

**False** Battering is caused by bad relationships. Women would not get beaten if they did not nag. Men are forced to be violent because women do not behave properly.

**True** Battering is an individual issue. Many men who batter have acted that way with several partners. Men in poor relationships have a choice not to batter. Battering wrecks relationships. Battering is not about how women do or do not behave. It is about poor choices involving power and control.

**False** Women are just as violent and abusive as men.

**True** Research consistently shows that men are much more likely to be violent towards their intimate partners than women. Many studies of women perpetrating violence against men do not control for the fact that women use self-defense against men who batter.

## Myths About Battered Women

**False** Battered women enjoy being abused. They are masochistic. They ask for it. They come from violent families and seek out violent relationships. They would leave the relationship if they did not like or deserve violence.

**True** Women do not enjoy or deserve to be abused. If a woman says: "Go ahead and hit me," it is probably because she knows it is coming one way or another. Some women are from abusive families and others are not. Women do not seek out abusive relationships. Some battered women have been in several violent relationships, probably because so many men batter. Battered women stay in relationships because of many reasons. They have few choices or options. They do not have money or job skills. The man has convinced her that it was her fault, she will never find anyone better, or that she deserved it. Family and religious pressure may prevent her from leaving.

**False** Battered women are always uneducated, "lower class" or working class, or poor. Battered women are from minority groups, who do not know any better.

**True** Battered women are from all groups in our country. Race, lack of education or wealth, and social background do not make battered women. Many rich, educated, and well-to-do women are battered.

**False** Battered women are always beat up. They look abused and assaulted. You can always tell who they are.

**True** Most battered women are not beat up every day. They often go out of their way to hide their injuries and scars. Many women who look normal are battered. And not all abuse is physical.

**False** Battered women are mentally ill or crazy. They are defective and inferior.

**True** Victims of abuse and battering are often confused and overwhelmed. It is hard for them to believe that they are being treated that way. Their self-esteem and sense of personal safety is lowered from abuse. They tend to blame themselves because many others blame them.

**False** Battered women cannot recover. They will always be battered and damaged.

**True** Battered women can heal and recover from abuse. Battered women are not defective. They can learn to protect themselves from more violence. However, damage caused to relationships from battering is hard to repair. Most men who seek help for battering have already ruined their relationships beyond the point of no return.

**This document was adapted from a publication of the Domestic Abuse Project ([www.domesticabuseproject.org](http://www.domesticabuseproject.org))**

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