
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL WORK

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Introduction

Domestic violence or abuse refers to a pattern of coercive behaviour used to establish power and control over a partner in an intimate relationship. The abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or economic. Some acts are crimes in most states (such as physical assault, sexual assault, menacing, arson, kidnapping, harassment), while other battering episodes are not illegal (such as name-calling, denying access to the family automobile, control of financial resources).

Social workers have been working with victims of domestic violence for years in the courts, the emergency rooms, and shelters. Domestic violence does not discriminate, it happens in every racial and ethnic community, as well as in every socioeconomic group. It seems incomprehensible that battered women stay in abusive relationships, however, many women are often held captive by their own sense of powerlessness and the overwhelming sole responsibility for the marriage and their children. The fear that if they leave they will have to care for themselves and their children alone creates feelings of depression and despair.

Assistance to battered women must take the form of a continuum of services to improve their economic and psychological independence. Social workers should be in the habit of screening for domestic violence and provide a plan to protect the victim's safety. Research has shown that the prevalence and the health, social and economic costs of domestic violence require the attention of early identification and intervention.

What Are the Causes of Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a learned behaviour. Historically, violence against women and children has largely been ignored or condoned by society. Common myths about the causes of domestic violence include the following:

•Myth: Alcohol or drug problems are the cause

Although abusers may also have drug or alcohol problems, there is no causal relationship between the two. They are separate problems and each must be addressed independently.

•Myth: Temporary anger and loss of control are the cause

The abuser may or may not be angry prior to the use of physical force or other coercion. Domestic violence is an established pattern of power and control exercised by the abuser to maintain dominance.

•Myth: Problems in the relationship and/or the victim's behaviour are the cause

The abuser may attempt to use relationship issues or behaviour of the victim as an excuse for his violence, but the issue is his behaviour. This is why couples counseling, communications workshops or marriage enrichment programs are not effective in ending abuse; they may actually increase the danger to the partner being abused.

- Stress
- Economic hardship, such as prolonged unemployment
- Depression
- Desperation
- Jealousy

Who Are the Victims of Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence affects people in all racial/ethnic, socio-economic, religious, geographic, and occupational groups. Women are victims of domestic violence more often than men.

Warning signs that a person is a victim of domestic violence in the work place

If we witness a cluster of the following warning signs in the workplace, we can reasonably suspect domestic abuse:

- Bruises and other signs of impact on the skin, with the excuse of “accidents”
- Depression, crying
- Frequent and sudden absences
- Frequent lateness
- Frequent, harassing phone calls to the person while they are at work
- Fear of the partner, references to the partner’s anger
- Decreased productivity and attentiveness
- Isolation from friends and family
- Insufficient resources to live (money, credit cards, car)

If we do recognize signs of domestic abuse in a co-worker, talk to the Human Resources department. The Human Resources staff should be able to help the victim without any further involvement.

Forms of Domestic Violence

Forms of domestic violence can include physical violence, sexual violence, economic control, psychological assault (including threats of violence and physical harm, attacks against property or pets and other acts of intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, and use of the children as a means of control), stalking or cyberstalking emotional abuse and spiritual abuse.

***Physical violence***

It involves the use of physical force against another. Examples include hitting, shoving, grabbing, biting, restraining, shaking, choking, burning, forcing drug/alcohol use, and assault with a weapon, etc. Physical violence may or may not result in an injury that requires medical attention.

Sexual violence

It involves the violation of an individual’s bodily integrity (sexual assault), including coercing sexual contact, rape, and prostitution, as well as any unwelcome sexual behaviour (sexual harassment), and including treating someone in a sexually demeaning manner or any other conduct of a sexual nature, whether physical, verbal, or non-verbal. Sexual abuse also includes behaviour which limits reproductive rights, such as preventing use of contraceptive methods and forcing abortion.



**Psychological abuse**

It is often characterized as intimidation, threats of harm, and isolation. Examples include instilling fear in an intimate partner through threatening behaviour, such as damaging property or abusing pets, constant supervision, or controlling what the victim does and

who they talk to. Spiritual abuse may be included as a type of psychological abuse. It involves the misuse of spiritual or religious beliefs to manipulate or exert power and control over an intimate partner (i.e., using scripture to justify abuse or rearing the children in a faith or religious practice the partner has not agreed to).

Emotional abuse

It involves undermining an individual's sense of self-worth. Examples of emotional abuse include constant criticism, name-calling, embarrassing, mocking, humiliating, and treating like a servant.

**Economic abuse**

It involves making or attempting to make the victim financially dependent on the abuser. Examples of economic abuse include preventing or forbidding an intimate partner from working or gaining and education, controlling the financial resources, and withholding access to economic resources.



Stalking or cyberstalking

Stalking is harassment of or threatening another person, especially in a way that haunts the person physically or emotionally in a repetitive and devious manner. Stalking of an intimate partner can take place during the relationship, with intense monitoring of the partner's activities. Or stalking can take place after a partner or spouse has left the relationship. The stalker may be trying to get their partner back, or they may wish to harm their partner as punishment for their departure. Regardless of the fine details, the victim fears for their safety. Stalking can take place at or near the victim's home, near or in their workplace, on the way to the store or another destination, or on the Internet (cyberstalking). Stalking can be on the phone, in person, or online. Stalkers may never show their face, or they may be everywhere, in person.

**Cyberstalking**

Cyberstalking is the use of telecommunication technologies such as the Internet or email to stalk another person. Cyberstalking may be an additional form of stalking, or it may be the only method the abuser employs. Cyberstalking is deliberate, persistent, and personal. Spamming with unsolicited email is different from cyberstalking. Spam does not focus on the individual, as does cyberstalking. The cyberstalker methodically finds

and contacts the victim. Much like spam of a sexual nature, a cyberstalker's message may be disturbing and inappropriate. Also like spam, you cannot stop the contact with a request. In fact, the more you protest or respond, the more rewarded the cyberstalker feels. The best response to cyberstalking is not to respond to the contact.

Cyberstalking falls in a grey area of law enforcement. Enforcement of most state and federal stalking laws requires that the victim be directly threatened with an act of violence. Very few law enforcement agencies can act if the threat is only implied.

Regardless of whether you can get stalking laws enforced against cyberstalking, you must treat cyberstalking seriously and protect yourself. Cyberstalking sometimes advances to real stalking and to physical violence.



Spiritual abuse includes:

- using the spouse's or intimate partner's religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate them
- preventing the partner from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs
- ridiculing the other person's religious or spiritual beliefs
- forcing the children to be reared in a faith that the partner has not agreed to

Domestic Violence Centres in Rajasthan

1. Vikalp Sansthan

Location: Jodhpur **Setting:** Urban **Established:** 2004 **Staff:** Office: 17 Field: 50

Vikalp Sansthan's mission is to spread awareness and inspire understanding of the problems related to gender based violence, to make individuals aware of their rights as human beings, and to empower young women and men to actively participate in development and social change. Vikalp works in 12 districts of Western and southern Rajasthan, focusing on this region due to its strong social problems including but not limited to a rigid caste system, illiteracy, female infanticide, violence against women, forced child marriage, and dowry. Their long-term vision is to create a violence free society based on equality, peace, and justice.

2. Vividha

A group of women's rights activists, educators and social workers came together to form **Vividha** - a collective for critical and creative consultations on women's issues. Vividha is an activity of the Mahila Punarwas Samooch Samiti, a registered society founded in 1986. Its mission is to strengthen women's status and ensure their participation in every sphere of life and thus help in building a more just and egalitarian society.

What are the results of domestic violence or abuse?

The results of domestic violence or abuse can be very long-lasting. People who are abused by a spouse or intimate partner may develop sleeping problems, depression, anxiety attacks, low self-esteem, lack of trust in others, feelings of abandonment, anger, sensitivity to rejection, diminished mental and physical health, inability to work, poor relationships with their children and other loved ones, substance abuse as a way of coping, Physical abuse may result in death, if the victim does not leave the relationship.

Conclusion

Many domestic violence programs have internships for social work students, increasing the capacity of the field to respond to the complex needs of survivors. These social work field placements in domestic violence advocacy settings present challenges for students to connect the experiences and lessons of social work clinical internships to the content and theories presented in the classroom, where relatively little time is focused on domestic violence dynamics and interventions.

A career in social work is first and foremost about helping people with the difficulties they face. Social Workers do this by developing a working relationship with children, young people and their families.

However, families are complicated, so a social worker works must always work hard to maintain a balance between compassion and making the right decisions to protect children.

Social work, then, is not only about working with children and families to develop long-lasting solutions that keep families together, but it can also be about taking the difficult decision to remove a child from a situation that is showing no signs of improvement and where the child is likely to suffer harm.

Social workers provide therapy to victims of domestic violence while they are in a shelter or living in their community. Social workers also serve as executive directors of domestic violence organizations.

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