Facts on Gender Based Violence

Forms of Violence against Women

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is not an isolated, individual event, but rather a pattern of perpetrator behaviors used against a victim. The pattern consists of a variety of abusive acts, occurring in multiple episodes over the course of the relationship. Some episodes consist of a sustained attack with one tactic repeated many times (e.g., punching), combined with a variety of other tactics (such as name calling, threats, or attacks against property). Other episodes consist of a single act (e.g., a slap, a “certain look”). One tactic (e.g., physical assault) may be used infrequently, while other types of abuse (such as name calling or intimidating gestures) may be used daily. Some parts of the pattern are crimes in most countries (e.g., physical assault, sexual assault, menacing, arson, kidnapping, harassment) while other battering acts are not illegal (e.g., name calling, interrogating children, denying the victim access to the family automobile). All parts of the pattern interact with each other and can have profound physical and emotional effects on victims. Victims respond to the entire pattern of perpetrators’ abuse rather than simply to one episode or one tactic.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical abuse may include spitting, scratching, biting, grabbing, shaking, shoving, pushing, restraining, throwing, twisting, slapping (with open or closed hand), punching, choking, burning, and/or use of weapons (e.g., household objects, knives, guns) against the victim. The physical assaults may or may not cause injuries.

TYPES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence can take many forms and take place under very different circumstances. A person can be sexually violated by one individual or several people (e.g. gang-rapes); the incident may be planned or a surprise attack. Although sexual violence occurs most commonly in the victim’s home (or in the perpetrator’s home), it also takes place in many other settings, such as the workplace, at school, in prisons, cars, the streets or open spaces (e.g. parks, farmland). The perpetrator of a sexual assault may be a date, an acquaintance, a friend, a family member, an intimate partner or former intimate partner, or a complete stranger, but more often than not, is someone known to the victim. There is no stereotypical perpetrator; sexually violent men come from all backgrounds, rich and poor, academic and uneducated, religious and non-religious. Perpetrators may be persons in positions of authority who are respected and trusted (e.g. a doctor, teacher, tourist guide, priest, police
officer) and thus less likely to be suspected of sexual violence. Sexual violence is common in situations of war and armed conflict. Specifically, rape and sexual torture are frequently used as weapons to demoralize the enemy; women are sometimes forced into “temporary marriages” with enemy soldiers. Women who are incarcerated may be subjected to sexual violence by prison guards and police officers. Other forms of sexual violence include, but are not limited to:

sexual slavery; sexual harassment (including demands for sex in exchange for job promotion or advancement or higher school marks or grades); trafficking for purposes of forced prostitution; forced exposure to pornography; forced pregnancy; forced sterilization; forced abortion; forced marriage; female genital mutilation;

(WHO Guidelines for Medico-legal care of victims of Sexual Violence, page 7 to 8)

**PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE**

There are different types of psychological assaults.

**Threats of violence and harm**

The perpetrator’s threats of violence or harm may be directed against the victim or others important to the victim or they may be suicide threats. Sometimes the threat includes killing the victim and others and then committing suicide. The threats may be made directly with words (e.g., “I’m going to kill you,” “No one is going to have you,” “Your mother is going to pay,” “I cannot live without you”) or with actions (e.g., stalking, displaying weapons, hostage taking, suicide attempts).

**Emotional violence**

Emotional abuse is a tactic of control that consists of a wide variety of verbal attacks and humiliations, including repeated verbal attacks against the victim’s worth as an individual or role as a parent, family member, friend, co-worker, or community member. In domestic violence, verbal attacks and other tactics of control are intertwined with the threat of harm in order to maintain the perpetrator’s dominance through fear. While repeated verbal abuse is damaging to partners and relationships over time, it alone does not establish the same climate of fear as verbal abuse combined with the use or threat of physical harm.

Emotional abuse may also include humiliating the victim in front of family, friends or strangers. Perpetrators may repeatedly claim that victims are crazy, incompetent, and unable “to do anything right.” Not all verbal insults between partners are acts of violence. In order for verbal abuse to be considered domestic violence, it must be part of a pattern of coercive behaviors in which the perpetrator uses or threatens to use physical force.
Isolation

Perpetrators often try to control victims’ time, activities and contact with others. They gain control over them through a combination of isolating and disinformation tactics. Isolating tactics may become more overtly abusive over time. Through incremental isolation, some perpetrators increase their psychological control to the point where they determine reality for the victims. Perpetrators’ use of disinformation tactics such as distorting what is real through lying, providing contradictory information, or withholding information is compounded by the forced isolation of the victims. For example, perpetrators may lie to victims about their legal rights or the outcomes of medical interventions. While many victims are able to maintain their independent thoughts and actions, others believe what the perpetrators say because the victims are isolated from contrary information. Through his victim’s isolation, the perpetrator prevents discovery of the abuse and avoids being held responsible for it.

Use of children

Some abusive acts are directed against or involve children in order to control or punish the adult victim (e.g., physical attacks against a child, sexual use of children, forcing children to watch the abuse of the victim, engaging children in the abuse of the victim). A perpetrator may use children to maintain control over his partner by not paying child support, threatening to take children away from her, involving her in long legal fights over custody, or kidnapping or taking the children hostage as a way to force the victim’s compliance. Children are also drawn into the assaults and are sometimes injured simply because they are present (e.g., the victim is holding an infant when pushed against the wall) or because the child attempts to intervene in the fight.

USE OF ECONOMICS

Perpetrators control victims by controlling their access to all of the family resources: time, transportation, food, clothing, shelter, insurance, and money. He may actively resist the victim becoming financially self-sufficient as a way to maintain power and control. Conversely, he may refuse to work and insist that she support the family. He may expect her to be the family “bookkeeper,” requiring that she keep all records and write all checks, or he may keep financial information away from her. In all instances he alone makes the decisions. Victims are put in the position of having to get “permission” to spend money on basic family needs. When the victim leaves the battering relationship, the perpetrator may use economics as a way to maintain control or force her to return: refusing to pay bills, instituting legal procedures costly to the victim, destroying assets in which she has a share, or refusing to work “on the books” where there would be legal access to his income. All of these tactics may be used regardless of the economic class of the family.