Violence Against Women: Domestic Violence & Prostitution

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and it was established in 1987. That same year the first national toll-free hotline began. In 1989, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was Commemorative Legislation passed by Congress.

Domestic violence is a pattern of physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse, which includes, but is not limited to, threats, intimidation, isolation, and/or financial control. Domestic violence is an intentional pattern of behavior used by one person as a means to harm and take power and control over another person in the context of a dating, family, roommate or caretaker relationship. Violence, an assault on a person’s control over her/his body and life, can take many forms and has varying consequences depending on the assault, its context and interpretations.

Who is affected by domestic violence?

1. Women are much more likely to be victims of violence by men since violence is a consequence of power.
2. Men who have been abused in the past try to “master” the abuse by identifying with the source of their victimization and avoiding the weakness.
3. Children who witness domestic violence are at greater risk for developing psychiatric disorders, developmental problems, social failure, violence against others and low self-esteem.
4. Pets are victims of power and control and animals are basically, defenseless.

Many survivors describe the abuse that they endured as happening in a cycle, meaning that there seems to be a pattern that occurs. Of course, all relationships are different, and some do not fall into the cycle, however, when they do, the cycle described below is similar for many survivors. The cycle consists of three phases, known as the:

- **Tension Building Phase**: often described by victims as "walking on eggshells"
- **Explosion Phase**: hitting, slapping, punching, spitting, throwing objects, etc.
- **Honeymoon/Reconciliation Phase**: characterized by apologies and promises that the violence will not happen again

The cycle repeats itself and as power/control is established, the frequency of violence increases while the duration between cycles becomes shorter!

Here are 17 “Red Flags” of potential domestic violence to watch for in a relationship:

1. Push for a quick relationship
2. Jealous and/or possessive
3. Suspicious about everyone you speak to
4. Hides controlling behavior behind ‘concern for your safety’
5. Discourages or controls what you do and who you see
6. Expects you to always be available or with them
7. Do you fear expressing opinions that will upset them?
8. Sudden mood swings
9. Puts down everyone you know
10. Believes all their problems are someone else’s fault
11. Sees everything as a personal attack and is easily insulted
12. Blows things out of proportion
13. Forces you to do things sexually that you don’t want to
14. Puts you down or makes you feel stupid in front of friends
15. Believes males and females have very specific roles
16. Was abusive to a previous partner
17. Breaks or strikes things in front of you

**Myths vs. Facts of Domestic Violence**

**MYTH:** Children aren’t aware of or affected by the violence in their home.

**FACT:** Studies show that 90% of children are aware of the violence directed at their parent. Children who witness violence are just as traumatized as they would be if the violence was directly targeted at them.

**MYTH:** If the abuse was that bad, the victim would just leave.

**FACT:** Victims stay in abusive relationships for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include fear for physical safety, having no place to go, no access to money, hope that the violence will stop, etc. Some studies show that victims leave an average of seven times before they leave for good, and that victims are likely to be killed or seriously injured at the time of their departure.

**MYTH:** Domestic violence only happens in poor, undereducated families and relationships.

**FACT:** Studies of domestic violence have found that battering occurs among all types of families and relationships, regardless of income, profession, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, educational level or race. However, lower income victims and abusers are over-represented in calls to police and shelters because of a lack of other resources.

**MYTH:** Alcohol abuse causes domestic violence, not the abuser.

**FACT:** Although there is a high correlation between alcohol/drugs and battering, it is not the cause of abuse. Batterers use drinking as one of many excuses for their violent behavior. Blaming the alcohol is an easy way for abusers to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Stopping the abuser’s drinking will not stop the violence. Both battering and substance abuse need to be addressed separately, as overlapping yet independent problems.

**Getting out of domestic violence**

Most importantly, **MAKE A SAFETY PLAN!** Take important documents and money to a safe place. Inform family, friends, employers, children’s school, neighbors of your situation. Go to a safe place like a crisis
center, family, or a friend. Contact a crisis center or your police department for legal assistance such as restraining order, counseling and assistance. DO NOT CONTACT THE ABUSER!

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) provides assistance and education to programs that serve battered women and their children in both rural and urban areas. To respond to the housing needs of battered women in Iowa, ICADV created the Housing and Economic Advocacy Taskforce (HEAT) to increase the capacity of domestic violence programs and advocates to identify and address housing and economic needs and work to expand economic opportunities for women at the local, state, and national levels.

**Prostitution – The Pros & Cons**

One million American women and girls work as prostitutes. One percent of U.S. women have worked as prostitutes at some point, with four years being an average length of career. There are 100,000 arrests annually for prostitution. Of women held at the Cook County Jail (Chicago) during a one-year period, about 75% were first arrested for prostitution.

Is prostitution just an adult issue? No - 500,000 to 1.2 million children are involved in child prostitution in the U.S. There are at least 300,000 male prostitutes under age 16. One study found that 78% of adult prostitutes began prostitution as juveniles: 60% were 16 years of age and under, and some were as young as 10. Most children enter prostitution at the age of 14. 60% of child prostitutes are first recruited by peers; 96% of prostitutes who began committing prostitution as juveniles were runaways. Most stated they had no other option for making money.

Prostitution transcends all races, however, 40% of street prostitutes are women of color, 55% of those arrested are women of color, and 85% of prostitutes sentenced to jail time are women of color.

Is prostitution gender specific? No - 27% of juvenile male prostitutes are involved in the pornography industry. Male prostitutes are much less likely to be arrested for prostitution than females.

Prostitution is one of the most debated topics, especially when it comes to whether or not prostitution should be legalized. The arguments for legalizing prostitution and against legalizing it are listed below:

**Pros:**

- No one is necessarily harmed by it is because that there are consenting adults involved.
- Prostitutes are not committing an harmful act
- While the spread of disease and other detriments are possible in the practice of prostitution, criminalization is not the way to go.
- Prostitution creates a setting whereby crimes against men, women, and children become a commercial enterprise
- When a pimp compels a prostitute to submit to sexual demands as a condition of employment, it is exploitation, sexual harassment, or rape
- It's a choice to be a prostitute
- "We chose sex work after we did a lot of things we couldn't stand. Sex work is better. For me, sex work isn't my first choice of paying work. It just happens to be the best alternative
available. It's better than being president of someone else's corporation. It's better than being a secretary. It is the most honest work I know of." -- Veronica Monet, Prostitute and Author in Gauntlet Magazine, 1994.

- If we legalize prostitution there will be less people going behind the backs of the system to get illegal sex.
- It will help reduce the amount of trafficking of human beings
- The existence of prostitution could be recognized if prostitution was legalized and the legal and social rights of prostitutes could be guaranteed
- There is evidence that some systems of legalization provide a relatively safe working environment, although no system is risk free.
- Women working in legal brothels and window units in the Netherlands experience very little violence
- Brothel sex workers have very low rates of STDs and HIV, and most enjoy better sexual health than the general community. There is a strong culture of safe sex in the industry and condom use is now an almost universal practice.
- Excellent sexual health standards have been developed voluntarily, without criminalizing the involvement of sex workers with STDs or HIV in the industry
- It is estimated that if prostitution were legalized in the United States, the rape rate would decrease by roughly 25% for a decrease of approximately 25,000 rapes per year
- This support the thought that the rape rate could be lowered if prostitution was more readily

**Cons:**

- Prostitutes are pushed into such a career choice, because they feel inadequate doing other means of employment
- "The ILO [International Labor Organization] report admits that most women 'choose' prostitution for economic reasons. Surely no one can argue that this is free choice any more than the cattle in the squeeze chute choose to go to their death." -- Diane Post, J.D. (http://prostitution.procon.org/view.source.php?sourceID=394)
- Prostitution is the direct result of human trafficking, so if we would just put a stop to prostitution we could get rid of human trafficking.
- Those who have been trafficked typically go into prostitution when they get older.
- Prostitution is extremely dangerous for women. Homicide occurs frequently in this line of employment.
- It is a cruel lie to suggest that legalization will protect anyone in prostitution. It is not possible to protect someone whose source of income exposes them to the likelihood of being raped on average once a week
• The average prostitute services between 10-15 clients a day. It is possible to test negative for STDs/HIV up to 4-6 weeks after taking the test. Therefore, one single prostitute alone could infect up to 630 clients before testing positive.
• Prostitution cannot eliminate rape when it is itself “bought” rape.
• The connection between rape and prostitution is that women are turned into objects for men's sexual use; they can be either bought or stolen.
• A culture in which women can be bought for use is one in which rape flourishes

Most prostitutes have been victimized, at some point in their lives, by sexual violence. More than 90% suffered childhood sexual abuse, often incest. Many others have been sexually assaulted in the course of working in prostitution. About 75% have been violently raped as adults in situations not involving their work.

Human rights: The basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled. This includes:

- right to life and liberty
- right to freedom of expression
- right to equality before the law
- before social
- before cultural
- economic rights
- participate in culture
- right to food
- right to work
- right to education

There have been many ways that women in the past and the present have not had equal rights that are given freely to men. Women in the past have not been allowed to:

- self-govern
- be educated
- have integrity
- enroll in the military
- vote
- serve in the military
- hold public office
- work
- enter into legal contracts
- have fare wages
- have material or parental rights
- own property

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