



Safety: Domestic Violence - Common Myths

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Define intimate partner violence.
2. Identify characteristics of the cycle of abuse.
3. List three types of domestic violence.
4. Discuss factual information that clarifies myths about IPV.

In the US today, there is an epidemic of domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV). IPV can be defined as intentional violent or controlling behavior by a person who is currently, or was previously, in an intimate relationship with the victim.



IPV can take many different forms, but the essence is that the abuser tries to control the victim through physical and/or emotional means.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 1 in 3 women have suffered abuse at the hands of an intimate partner, such as a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, spouse or ex-spouse. IPV is primarily an issue of women being abused by men. In a smaller percentage of cases, men are abused by women, or abuse occurs in same-sex intimate relationships. However, in 85% of cases, the abuser is male, and the victim is female.

IPV is a serious public health issue. In order to effectively address this issue, knowledge and understanding of the facts related to IPV are essential. There are many myths that may prevent affected people from reporting IPV and seeking appropriate help. This newsletter will discuss common myths related to IPV regarding the victim, the abuser, and factors that promote IPV. Facts will be presented to correct these myths and clarify the truth about IPV.

The Cycle of Domestic Violence

IPV typically occurs in the following cycle:

Tension-building: The abuser becomes increasingly angry over time. He finds any reason to criticize the victim. The victim often tries to "be good" to keep him calm, and feels as though she is walking on eggshells.

Violence: The stress between the couple escalates to violence. The abuser may yell, break objects, and physically attack the victim. The victim's main concern during this time is survival, and protection of any children who may be in the home.

Honeymoon Stage: In this stage, the abuser may deny that abuse occurred, or he may appear to be very sorry and ask forgiveness. He may blame the victim for his actions, "If you just hadn't made me so angry, I wouldn't have to hit you." He'll promise that it will never happen again, and may bring gifts and lavish



attention on the victim. The victim truly wants to believe what he says. Unfortunately, after the honeymoon stage, the cycle repeats itself, with gradual building of tension, until another episode of battering occurs.

IPV—Common Myths

The abuse of IPV might be physical, meaning the victim is pushed, hit, burned, choked, assaulted with weapons, or physically hurt in some other way. Sexual abuse includes rape or other forced sexual acts. Emotional

or psychological abuse may also occur. This may include yelling, threatening, throwing things, excessive control of money, or isolating the victim from her family and friends. All forms of abuse serve to degrade the victim to lower her self-esteem and make her more dependent on the abuser.

There are many misconceptions about IPV. Common myths include:

- *No one would stay in an abusive relationship unless they liked it.* **FACT:** Victims of IPV do not want to be abused. There are many reasons why they do not leave the relationship. Fear of retaliation from the abuser is a major concern, since the most dangerous times for the victim are when she attempts to leave, and shortly after she does leave. Many women fear losing their children in a custody dispute if they leave. Also, there may be isolation from family and friends caused by the abuser, or no access to money, since this is often controlled by the abuser.
- *IPV is not common, it happens rarely.* **FACT:** IPV is very common, affecting over 5 million women in the US each year. Acts of IPV occur every 15 seconds in the US.
- *IPV doesn't happen in "nice" neighborhoods or families. It affects mainly low-income, poorly-educated people.* **FACT:** IPV occurs in all types of neighborhoods and affects people of all ages, races, religions, cultures, socioeconomic levels and educational backgrounds.
- *IPV doesn't usually cause serious physical harm.* **FACT:** IPV commonly results in serious injury. Many victims are reluctant to seek medical treatment, however, due to shame or fear. Therefore, many injuries go undetected. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate that deaths related to IPV account for 30% of all female homicides in the US.
- *IPV is a personal issue in a couple's relationship—it's no one else's business.* **FACT:** IPV is not a relationship issue, it is a crime that can cause serious injury or death—it is everyone's business.
- *IPV results when the abuser just "loses control" and can't help it.* **FACT:** Abusers typically show a great deal of control. They often wait to abuse their victims in private, and are careful to cause injuries only where they won't be seen, such as under a shirt.
- *IPV is caused by stress, alcohol or drug use.* **FACT:** IPV can occur along with these factors, but they are not the underlying reasons for abuse.
- *The victim must be doing something to trigger the abuse.* **FACT:** No one deserves to be abused. A



common response of the abuser to rationalize his actions is to make it the victim's fault— "If you hadn't made me so angry..."

- *IPV is usually a one-time, isolated incident that is not repeated.* **FACT:** IPV typically occurs in a cycle of behavior that repeats itself and becomes progressively worse. Violence and the risk of physical harm tend to escalate each time it occurs.
- *A man has the right to treat his partner any way he chooses.* **FACT:** No one has the right to beat, threaten or coerce another person, regardless of the relationship. IPV is a crime, and must be viewed as such.
- *Abusers who batter their partners do not abuse children in the home.* **FACT:** Up to 70% of spouse/partner abusers also abuse children in the home.
- *If children are not abused, they are not affected by IPV.* **FACT:** Children are well aware of tension and violence in the home. It is very traumatic for them to see or hear violent behavior, or see the effects on the parent, such as crying, fear, and physical injuries. Normal growth and development is seriously affected by violence in the home, and the children are at risk for neglect and abuse. They are also at increased risk for future disorders, such as depression, substance abuse and continuing the cycle of abuse as either the victim or abuser.
- *It's easy to identify an abuser, since he/she is abusive and violent in all relationships.* **FACT:** It is not possible to identify an abuser just by looking at him. Some abusers are quite charming and friendly to others, and would never be suspected a batterer.
- *Only physical abuse is considered IPV.* **FACT:** In addition to physical and sexual abuse, IPV includes emotional and psychological abuse. The abuser commonly exerts control by lowering the victim's self-esteem to the point that she becomes powerless. He does this by telling her that she is worthless and no one else would want her. He may also yell, threaten to take the children, harm family pets, damage property, control money or food, or threaten the victim's life. Many victims say that this type of abuse can be worse than physical harm.
- *IPV is just a relationship or communication issue that can be solved with couples counseling.* **FACT:** IPV is not a relationship problem caused by the interaction of two people. It is a serious, individual issue of the abuser, who feels the need to control and dominate his partner.



IPV is a serious and common public health concern. Resources and advice for victims can be obtained from the National Domestic Violence hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____ UNIT: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- ____ 1. Which of the following best describes intimate partner violence (IPV)?
- A. rape or beating of a woman
 - B. physical attack of a family member by someone in the household
 - C. controlling or violent behavior by one spouse toward the other
 - D. any form of violence within a family
- ____ 2. Which of the following is common to all abusive relationships?
- A. sexual abuse
 - B. the desire to seek help
 - C. hitting and kicking
 - D. the need to control
- ____ 3. Just as many men as women are victims of domestic violence.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ____ 4. IPV includes which of the following types of abuse?
- A. psychological
 - B. physical
 - C. sexual
 - D. all of the above
- ____ 5. The cycle of abuse usually occurs in the following order:
- A. honeymoon > violence > tension-building
 - B. tension-building > honeymoon > violence
 - C. violence > tension-building > honeymoon
 - D. tension-building > violence > honeymoon

- _____ 6. During the honeymoon phase of abuse, the abuser is most likely to:
- A. throw things
 - B. hit the victim
 - C. apologize
 - D. tell the victim he wants to leave her
- _____ 7. The most dangerous time for a victim of IPV is when she:
- A. leaves the relationship
 - B. becomes pregnant
 - C. tells a friend or relative that she is being abused
 - D. first realizes that her husband or boyfriend is abusive
- _____ 8. Future cycles of abuse tend to become:
- A. more violent
 - B. less violent
 - C. longer, with an extended honeymoon period
 - D. shorter, with elimination of the tension-building phase
- _____ 9. Children who are not abused are not significantly affected by IPV.
- A. True
 - B. False
- _____ 10. Which of the following is a basic cause of IPV?
- A. actions of the victim
 - B. stress
 - C. alcohol or drugs
 - D. none of the above

