

# What Can I do if I know someone who is being abused

Guidance for friends  
and family

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This document, developed by War Against Rape (WAR), Karachi, is a PDF version of a publication by WAR by the same name, published in the year 2007. It is a comprehensive packet offering information regarding domestic violence. It can be used by family, friends and neighbors, both male and female, who wish to understand the causes and implications of domestic violence or wish to offer help to someone suffering from domestic abuse.

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## Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) in the home is a very common phenomenon and is most frequently perpetrated by men against women. Violence in the home, also known as Domestic Violence, is perhaps the most underreported crime against women next to rape and is often ignored at large by society over more obvious crimes against women such as rape and honor killing.

The Pakistani society has yet to grasp the full extent of the problem. A major part of the population discounts the gravity of the situation by considering it nothing more than isolated and random incidences of violence that take place within the privacy of a “*char devari*” (four walls). Here, women are maimed and brutally murdered by men they trust and even women activists have sadly kept away from bringing the issue into the sphere of public discussion. This has resulted in the emergence of two divergent trends: the religious clerics are increasingly pushing their idea of ideal subservience to men by women, which is allegedly endorsed by religious tradition, and women who opt for separations or divorce are being looked upon either as victims of Western feminism or simply as deviant women who are too independent-minded for their own good.

Often, women are faced with a daunting number of barriers to escaping violence: they may fear retribution upon disclosure; they fear blame for breaking up the family and depriving their children (if any) of a parent; or they may even still love the abuser, expecting him to change. Often children of the family are the worst affected in homes where violence is regularly practiced by one or both spouses. This may translate into arrested mental development and out-of-character and rebellious behavior, among other personality changes.

This manual has been assembled by War Against Rape (WAR) as a guide for those who may know women facing abuse in their homes. It is meant to be of assistance to both male and female friends and family members to identify abused women and families, to become aware of the socio-cultural, socio-economic and psychological causes and implications of abuse and to gain information on how to provide subsequent help.

## What constitutes abuse?

Abuse is a form of long-term torture usually inflicted by one's nearest and dearest. It is a grievous violation of trust and it leads to disorientation, fear, depression, and suicidal ideation. It generates aggression in the abused and this overwhelming and all-pervasive emotion metastasizes and transforms into pathological envy, violence, rage, and hatred.<sup>1</sup>

Susan Schechter, one of the earliest and continuing leaders in the study of domestic violence, defines battering as:

“...A pattern of coercive control that one person exercises over another. Abusers use physical and sexual violence, threats, emotional insults and economic deprivation as a way to dominate their partners and get their way. Relationships in which one partner uses assault and coercion can be found among married and unmarried heterosexuals, lesbians and gay males. Battering is a behavior that physically harms, arouses fear, prevents an individual from doing what she/he wishes or forces her her/him to behave in ways that she/he does not want to.”

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gradations of Abuse, Narcissism Revisited* by Dr. Sam Vaknin, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007

## Forms of abuse

Abuse within the home takes many forms. These include:

1. **Physical** - includes pushing, shoving, slapping, hitting with a fist, kicking, choking, grabbing, pinching, pulling hair, threatening with weapons, withholding physical needs including repeated interruption of sleep or meals, food, transportation, or help if sick or injured, locking into or out of the house and refusing to give or rationing necessities.
2. **Verbal** - calling or referring to the woman with abusive words and degrading sentences.
3. **Sexual** - includes forced sex with the threat of violence, sex after violence has occurred, the use of objects or damaging acts without the woman's consent, laughing or making fun of the other's sexuality or body, making offensive statements, insulting or name-calling in relation to sexual preferences or behavior.
4. **Psychological/Emotional** - includes brainwashing, control of the woman's freedom to come and go when and where she chooses and whom she talks to through disapproving words, gestures and looks. Smashing things in her presence can also cause emotional or psychological trauma.
5. **Intimidation** - saying things like "If you \_\_\_\_\_, I'll kill you!" and threatening with divorce and harming the children.
6. **Economic** – not giving her an allowance, denying her money, not allowing her to have a job, making her lose her job by making her late for work, refusing to provide transportation to work, or by harassing her at work, either in person or over the phone.
7. **Destruction** – destroying property or harming pets.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/whatis.htm#forms>

## Why does abuse take place?

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem that results from an amalgamation of various socio-cultural and 'inherited' impulses, according to the latest theories. The latter is to say that abusers do not 'learn' their abusive ways, but rather they inherit them by exposure to abuse in their own homes when they were younger. Abuse is a means to assert control or dominance over women and is often used as an effective tool to 'manipulate' or 'influence'.

- The battering of wives has cultural, social, economic and psychological roots. They often result in cases where:
  1. the men have witnessed violence in their own families,
  2. wife battering is socially acceptable,
  3. drugs and/or alcohol abuse by the man has reduced the inhibition to abuse and the fear of consequences
  4. the man is unemployed or facing frustration at the work place, or
  5. the man suffers from some mental disorder that results in violent behavior.
- The abuser feels that he needs to instill fear by battering the woman in order to have his way.
- The socialization factor often leads men to develop a sense of superiority over the other sex, which may manifest itself through abusive behavior.
- Little or no access to medical counseling for anger management can render men incapable of controlling their fits of anger.
- Since women in Pakistan and other third world countries are traditionally dependent on men financially, battering women is often considered a matter of right, where the woman is expected to keep quite and 'take it'.

Men often abuse women because 'they can' and to establish their writ in the family hierarchy or structure. However, it must be remembered that domestic violence is a crime under law and women can be assisted in breaking free of such relationships.

# Who is the perpetrator?

It is often difficult to tell abusive men from non-abusive ones. The most courteous and kind men can in reality be spouse abusers.

However, there are some important psychological traits that can set them apart:

## **Risk Markers for Spousal Violence<sup>iii</sup>**

### **Intrapersonal elements:**

- low self-esteem
- fear of intimacy
- high power/control needs
- high levels of anger/hostility
- depression
- low stress tolerance
- defensiveness
- denial/minimization/justification of own violence

### **Interpersonal elements:**

- possessiveness/suspiciousness/jealousy of partner
- poor communication with partner
- guardedness in all relationships
- difficulty expressing affection
- verbal aggressiveness
- negative attitudes toward women

### **Environmental elements:**

- violence in family of origin
- alcohol/other drug abuse
- un- or under-employment
- child abuse (more than half of all batterers also abuse their children)

In addition, there are other risk markers that commonly go along with extreme spousal violence.

### **A History of:**

- having been severely abused by parents as a child
- having perpetrated severe spousal abuse
- separations and divorces
- using a weapon
- arrests

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<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/whymen.htm>

**Psychological Factors:**

- antisocial personality
- alcohol abuse or dependency
- generalized aggression
- emotional volatility
- high levels of dysphoria, alienation, dependency

**Situational Factors:**

- availability of a weapon
- recent separation
- threat of divorce
- child custody dispute
- recent escalation of violence
- verbal or non-verbal threats
- open hostility toward spouse
- isolation from supports for non-violent resolution of problems

## How can you identify an abused woman/family?

Very often, because of the secrecy that shrouds cases of domestic violence, it is difficult to tell for sure if someone is being abused. Women quite frequently make up stories to explain bruises, cuts and wounds on their bodies. However, there are certain indicators that can help establish whether someone is indeed suffering from abuse. These include:

- The woman seems jittery and over-anxious in your presence and even more so when her spouse is around,
- The husband 'orders' his wife to do things in front of others while showing disregard for her feelings and/or opinion,
- The woman mentions that her husband forces her to perform sexual acts which make her very uncomfortable,
- She always has unexplainable visible injuries on her body, such as bruises, cuts, burns, fractures or swellings,
- She avoids talking on the phone too long and her conversations are abruptly cut short when her husband comes home or enters the room,
- She has become reclusive and does not seem to talk and/or socialize as much as she used to once
- Her children also display signs of nervousness,
- Her children seem physically and/or verbally abusive amongst each other and/or with other children and show signs of juvenile delinquency,
- The children are performing badly in school or displaying difficulty in concentrating, passing in class exams, interacting with peers and maintaining discipline.

## How are the children affected?

Domestic violence can have a number of effects on children who witness it. Some of these effects can be direct physical harm whereas others are adverse emotional responses. While you may feel that it is crucial to help the abused woman and direct your energies toward her, it is also important to be aware of how witnessing abuse may affect her children. Some important things to note:

- ***Children can sustain physically injuries as a direct result of domestic violence.*** Batterers sometimes intentionally injure children in an effort to intimidate and control their spouse. Children often get injured during attacks on their mothers, especially when the child is small and being carried by the mother or when older children try to save their mothers from getting hurt.
- ***Batterers often tend to beat their children along with their wives.*** According to various studies on domestic violence, men who beat their wives also tend to beat the children.
- ***Emotional disturbances may develop in children.*** Although many parents believe that they can hide domestic violence from their children, children living in these homes report differently. Research suggests that between 80 and 90 percent of these children are aware of the violence. Even if they do not see a beating, they hear the screams and see the bruises, broken bones, and abrasions sustained by their mothers.<sup>iv</sup>
- ***Children's development and their sense of relationships may suffer.*** A very young child in an abusive home may suffer from sleep disturbances and nightmares. Pre-teen children may develop problems in making friends and maintaining relationships, and may exhibit signs of depression, anxiety, sluggishness, becoming reclusive and performing badly in academics. Adolescents may react by becoming violent and aggressive or by recreating violent situations, among the other abovementioned symptoms.
- ***Children may become future abusers.*** In most cases, according to various researches, batterers are men who have witnessed or suffered from domestic abuse. Knowing that domestic violence can breed future batterers, it is important that early intervention takes place to protect children from witnessing violence or being abused.

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<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=150>

## Emotional Reactions of Children to Domestic Violence<sup>v</sup>

- **Responsibility:** Children assume responsibility for the abuse and blame themselves. A typical statement is: “If I had just been a good boy/girl....”
- **Anxiety:** Children are constantly anxious and/or afraid anticipating the next abusive incident.
- **Transfer of Anxiety from Mother to Child:** Children sense the fear and trauma that their mothers have experienced even if they can’t verbalize these feelings. Children will express this anxiety in a variety of ways.
- **Guilt:** Children think they should have been able to prevent the violence and feel guilty for not doing so.
- **Grief:** When the mother leaves the abuser, the children may grieve over the “loss” of that parent and even the lifestyle they formerly lived.
- **Confusion:** Children may not know how they feel or they may have two opposite emotions at the same time. This is difficult for them. They may love the abuser but hate what he is doing to their mother.
- **Fear of Abandonment:** Children who have been separated from one of their parents because of the violent acts may be fearful that the other parent will also leave or die.
- **Need for Adult Attention:** Children who have been traumatized require intense attention to minimize their fears. If they do not receive this attention, they may act out.
- **Lack of Trust:** Children may have difficulty forming relationships. They may come to believe that violence is an inevitable or acceptable part of a relationship.
- **Aggressiveness/Passiveness:** Some children who witness violence in the home may become violent at school or in the community. Some children become overly passive and eager to please any adult.
- **Depression:** Children may feel overwhelmed by the violence and hopeless about the future. In some cases, children become suicidal.

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<sup>v</sup> <http://vadv.org/Resources/childwitnesses.html>

## Safety & Support for Children Who Witness Violence<sup>vi</sup>

Positive influences can help children overcome the negative effects of living with domestic violence. Here are some ideas for concerned adults:

- Allow children to talk about the violence. Listen to their feelings without judging them.
- Make sure children understand that the fighting is not their fault.
- Be a role model. Show by your example that there is a better way to solve problems than by violence.
- Hold violent adults accountable for their violence and its impact on their children.
- Encourage cooperation and respect in children's relationships with other children. Discourage fighting and teasing.
- Do what you can to establish a predictable daily routine.
- Create opportunities for age-appropriate fun.
- Watch and listen closely for signs that a child is being directly abused. Be prepared to respond.
- Devise a code word so that children can let trusted adults know when they need help, without alerting the abuser.
- Find additional support for children. Many domestic violence programs offer counseling or support groups for children who have witnessed or experienced violence. Teachers, clergy, relatives, and others can also be helpful.

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<sup>vi</sup> <http://vadp.org/Resources/childwitnesses.html>

## Why doesn't she leave him?

When one hears about husbands abusing their wives, it is a very common reaction to ask, "Why doesn't she just leave him?" Outside perspectives on domestic abuse stories are often tilted towards blaming the wife for passively tolerating abuse and not having the 'guts' or 'courage' to break free of the relationship.

Though it might seem like there are a number of ways to break off a relationship, women in abusive relationships often have a number of reasons for not leaving or not being able to leave their intimate partners. These reasons can only be understood by someone who is actually facing such abuse. These reasons include:

- **She fears being hunted down** – often, abusive partners exhibit moments of affection in which they tell their partners that they cannot live without them. There are often underlying threats in such remarks where the abuser is indirectly saying that they would hurt the woman if she were to try to leave. In many cases, women do not leave as they feel that the abuser would persist in his aggression and they would not be able to escape from him, even if the relationship ends.
- **She is afraid of aggravating her partner** – women often do not leave an abusive husband because they fear that this might further aggravate him, leading to more harm.
- **She hopes that he will change** – most women put up with abuse just because they are led to believe that the abuser might change his ways. Abusive husbands often apologize for their actions, especially when they wish to have sex with their partners. This leads women to believe that he is truly sorry for his actions and that the violence might stop. This is especially true for cases where the male partner drinks and the battering is obviously linked to drinking.
- **She faces pressure to reconcile** – family and friends often tell the woman that she should try to change his ways.
- **She still loves him** – even if some women face violence in their homes, some part of them might still love the man who beats her. This is especially true in cases where the husband batters on an irregular basis and sometimes displays affection.
- **She blames herself** – some women may be brainwashed to think that they somehow deserve the abuse. Women who got beatings when they were small are often the ones who feel this way.
- **She fears for her children's safety** – in some cases where the husband also beats the children, the woman might fear for their safety if she was to try and break off the relationship.

- **She has no means of income** – women who have no means to survive find it the most difficult to break up with their husbands. In countries like Pakistan, where women are traditionally dependent on men (fathers and husbands), women are afraid to leave the abusive relationship thinking that at least he provides food for her and her children.
- **She has other siblings who are unmarried or divorced** – women who come from families with unmarried or divorces daughters often feel that it would be unfair to burden their fathers with additional stomachs to feed.
- **Her religion or culture looks down on divorce/separation** – in societies where divorce and separation are looked down upon, women feel added societal pressure to not walk out on relationships.
- **She lacks confidence** – women who face abuse in their homes often end up not trusting their ability to take a stand. In severe cases, the beatings become such a cause for trauma that the woman cannot think straight and make concrete decisions.
- **She has many dependent children** – the more children the woman would have to support if she separates, the more difficult it is to take that decision.
- **She may not have alternatives for seeking shelter** – the lack of shelter homes in Pakistan, especially where women can stay with their female *and* male children, acts as a deterrent to moving out of abusive situations.

## Should you interfere in her family matters?

Most of us are often afraid that we might be 'interfering' a family's personal matters if we try to get involved. **Just remember that your efforts can make the difference in someone's life.** In cases where there are children involved, you would be helping more than one person and actively making efforts to prevent the children from growing up to be future abusers. Initially, you might be faced with embarrassing situations where she might shun your support but if you let her know that you really care and try to gain her confidence in her time of vulnerability, you can help save a family.

## How should you approach the situation?

Women who are abused by their intimate partners are faced with a unique situation: they are being abused by someone who has promised to let no harm come to them. In order to help, you can say that following things:

### Helpful things you can say<sup>vii</sup>

- I'm afraid for your safety.
- I'm afraid for the safety of your children.
- It will only get worse.
- We're here for you when you are ready or when you are able to leave.
- You deserve better than this.

**REMEMBER THAT THE FIRST FEW THINGS SHE WOULD SAY WOULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT INDICATORS OF HER THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.**

### Things NOT to say to a victim of domestic violence<sup>viii</sup>

- I know that you are a battered woman/man.
- Did you try to stop the abuse?
- What did you do to provoke the abuse?
- Why don't you just leave?
- If someone ever hit me, I know I'd leave immediately.
- That happened a while ago, can't you just forget about it?

### Helpful thing you can do

- Believe her.
- Recognize and appreciate her decision to talk to you.
- Let her know that you think her feelings are perfectly reasonable and normal and her anger justified.
- Let her lead the conversation. Try not to interrupt or ask too many questions while she is talking. Let her speak her heart and mind.
- If she asks you to do something you cannot or do not want to do, say so.
- Tell her you care about her and her safety.
- Offer your help to find resources in the community for protection, advocacy or support.
- Respect her pace and be patient.

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<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.wcstx.com/domsticv.htm#say>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://ohcm.gsfc.nasa.gov/family/domestic/whyrelation.htm#Things>

- Remind her of her strengths, accomplishments, and positive attributes.
- Always support her if she decides to take a stand.
- Remember that some communities still offer support to victims of domestic violence. Do not give her hope if you know that no support is likely.

### **Things NOT to *do* when helping**

- Do not blame her for the abuse – avoid saying or doing things that would make her feel like the abuse was somehow her fault. This would include talking to her family before her (she might feel like you do not trust her version of the story), and asking such things as “how can you possibly love him after what he did to you”, if she confides in you that she still has feelings for him.
- Do not be critical – do not try to find loopholes or flaws in her story. She would make her feel like she is being interrogated and she may not wish to confide in you anymore
- Do not advise – it is important that you only give your advice when sought and only with regard to what she would be comfortable doing. As much as possible do not advise her, and understand that her situation is unique to her; you cannot think for her.
- Do not curse or disrespect her partner in front of her – even though you might feel like cursing the person who is responsible for the woman’s plight, resist. Being the abuser’s wife, she might be inclined to defend his actions.
- Do not force her to leave him – acknowledge that the woman has been through a lot and that pressure from your side might make her want to lie back and not do anything because it might seem overwhelming.
- Do not make her problem about yourself – know that she is sharing this information trusting that you would understand. Do not make her problem about you or get mixed up in your own feelings and responses. Put your problems aside and concentrate on what she has to say.
- Do not give planned responses – even if you have heard similar stories before from other women, do not give preplanned or standard responses. Even if you know the solution, listen to her story first before you offer any advice. Otherwise, you would be blocking her from speaking since you already have an answer ready.

## A guide for YOU: Are you in an abusive relationship?

Want to know if you yourself are in an abusive relationship? Below is a checklist of abuse for you.

### **Does your spouse...**

- Threaten you with harm or intimidate you to get you to agree with him?
- Never acknowledge your accomplishments or respect your goals?
- Call up family and friends to check on where you are?
- Use drugs and alcohol in excess and hurt you emotionally or physically as a consequence?
- Make you feel like you are incapable of making decisions?
- Get physically rough with you, including such things shoving, grabbing harshly, slapping, biting, smacking, etc?
- Embarrass or make fun of you in front of friends or family?
- Blame you for his actions/behavior?
- Make you feel worthless or that you are nothing without him?
- Pressurize you into performing sexual acts that make you uncomfortable or hurt?
- Prevent you from going out of the home, even to meet with your parents?

### **Do you...**

- Not feel safe in your current relationship?
- Feel like no matter what you do, you can never please him?
- Avoid confrontations with your spouse even if you are within your rights?
- Always do what he wants you to do instead of what you want?
- Face embarrassment and constantly apologize to others for his actions?
- Feel that you cannot leave him even though you want to because you are afraid?

**If the answer to some of these questions is yes, then you need to speak with someone. Without help, the abuse is likely to continue.**

## Organizations that can help

Below is a list of organizations that can help:

### **Pakistan Women Lawyers Association (PAWLA)**

Room No. 710, Kashif Center,  
Main Shahra-e-Faisal, Karachi.

Tel: (9221) 5673286

Fax: (9221) 5673286

Services provided: Legal aid and legal counseling.

### **Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA)**

D-1, Court View Apartments, 1st Floor,  
Opposite Sindh Assembly Building,  
Court Road, Karachi.

Tel: (9221) 5685824, (9221) 5219902, 111911922

Services provided: Legal aid and legal counseling.

### **Aahung**

Town House No. G-28/29,  
Embassy Villa 10, Chaudary  
Khaliq-u-Zaman Road, Block 8,  
Clifton, Karachi.

Tel/Fax: (9221) 5870244, (9221) 5821654

Services provided: Guidance on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health.

### **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)**

(Sindh Chapter)

Unit No. 08, First Floor,  
State Life Building No. 5,  
(ILACO House), Abdullah Haroon Road,  
Sadar, Karachi.

Tel: (9221) 5637131, (9221) 5637132

Fax: (9221) 5637133

### **Marie Stopes Society (MSS)**

(various offices all over Karachi)

UAN: 111 538 538

Toll free no.: 0800 22 333

Services provided: Abortions, pregnancy testing,  
HIV/AIDS testing, STI testing, contraceptives, post-abortion care.

## References

The Gradations of Abuse, Narcissism Revisited by Dr. Sam Vaknin, 8th Edition, 2007

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<http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/whymen.htm>

<http://www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=150>

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<http://www.wcstx.com/domsticv.htm#say>

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