DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

WHO COMMITS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?
Domestic violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women. Numerous studies repeatedly illustrate this finding, as shown in the statistics cited earlier. Yet, in recent years, some studies suggest women use violence in intimate relationships as frequently as men do. These studies are refuted by credible members of the domestic violence discipline, particularly batterers' treatment providers, who are concerned about flaws in such studies:

1. *Motivation for the use of violence.* Most of the recent studies suggesting women and men equally engage in domestic violence fail to ask the survey respondent what motivated the use of violence in the intimate relationship. In studies that ask this question, the answer is consistent: Men use violence to establish or maintain power and control, and women use violence either in self-defense, in anticipation of violence, or in retaliation for violence perpetrated against them.

2. *Impact of violence on the intimate other--the fear factor.* Recent studies suggesting women and men equally engage in domestic violence generally fail to ask what the impact of the domestic violence is on the victim. When this question is asked, women report greater numbers of injuries, greater severity of injuries, and greater risk of harm. Men report few or no injuries, unless the woman uses a weapon, in particular a gun.

3. The issue most of these studies fail to examine is "who is afraid of whom?" Women report tremendous fear of violence--and injury--by the intimate other. Men largely report they are unafraid of the woman's use of violence, often finding it annoying or even amusing, unless the woman uses a weapon. Women generally only use a weapon in an effort to make him stop being violent.

4. *Credibility of response.* - First, those who work with batterers know that men who batter deny, minimize, and blame their use of violence on others. Thus, if these men are asked if they use violence in a relationship, there is a high probability they will say they do not. The vast majority of domestic violence victims are women.

WHEN DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCUR?
Domestic violence occurs as a pattern of abuse, not as a single isolated incident. Domestic violence can be distinguished from one-time situational violence, which can and does occur in many intimate relationships, such as the individual who shoves or slaps his spouse when learning she is having an affair or filing for a divorce.

WHERE DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCUR?
Domestic violence occurs in intimate relationships. These relationships include current or former spouses, partners, and significant others, including boyfriend/girlfriends, gays,
lesbians, transgendered persons, inter-sex persons, and bisexuals; family members, both by blood or by familial ties, such as in-laws, step-family members and foster family members; those who currently or formerly reside together, such as roommates and household members; those who have or share a child in common, or created a child in common; and those who provide services to a dependent person, such as attendants or caregivers for an elderly person or for a physically, cognitively, or mentally disabled person.

WHY DOES A PERSON ENGAGE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?
A person engages in domestic violence because he or she wishes to gain and/or maintain power and control over an intimate other, and believes he or she is entitled to do so. **Power and control wheels.** The power and control wheel demonstrates the pattern of coercive behavior in a domestic violence relationship.

The Dynamics of Domestic Violence

- **First, a stimulus.** The abuser sees his wife talking to another man at a party.

- **Second, a thought.** The abuser thinks any or all of these thoughts to himself: "She is interested in that man. Look at how she is flirting with him. She is coming on to him. They are probably making plans to go off and sleep together. She is planning to leave me."

- **Third, a feeling.** Angry; upset; scared of being left by the victim for another man.

- **Fourth, a behavior.** The abuser will do something to exert power and control over the victim.

- **Fifth, consequences.** A positive consequence, from the abuser's perspective, is that his wife will discontinue her behavior and quit talking to the other man. Another positive consequence may be that she will apologize for her behavior, which allows the man to believe she is doing something wrong and his fears are founded. Another positive consequence may be that he bolsters his sense of self-esteem by letting those around him know he has control over his wife--he is the "man in charge." An additional positive consequence may be that he makes her cry, which means she is not enjoying herself or appearing attractive to other men at this party.

- **Finally, the belief system.** Underlying this thought pattern is his belief system. Any or all of these beliefs are likely: "She doesn't really love me." "If I don't treat her like a man and keep her in her place, she will go off with some other guy." "If she really knew me, she wouldn't like me, so I better not let her get away from me." "Women will sleep around if you give them the chance." "She is responsible for taking care of all my needs." "I have a right to expect her to act like my woman."
Now let's examine the other half of the dynamics—the victim's response to this scenario:

- **First, a stimulus.** The wife sees her husband watching her as she talks to another man at a party.

- **Second, a thought.** The wife thinks any or all of these thoughts: "I am really enjoying this conversation—it's been a long time since someone just talked to me. But I know my husband. If I am having a good time, he thinks it means I am interested in the person I'm talking with. I better not break the rules or I will pay a price."

- **Third, a feeling.** Scared; apprehensive; uneasy; wary; guilty; contrite; resentful; angry.

- **Fourth, a behavior.** The victim's behavior is in response to the abuser's action(s). She will take her cues from her husband as to her behavior choices. If the abuser gives her a look, she will walk away from the other man at the party and come and stand by the abuser.

- **Fifth, consequences.** A positive consequence, from the wife's perspective, is that her husband is once again calmed down, and the peace is restored. Another positive consequence may be that she feels flattered because he is expressing his fear of losing her. An additional positive consequence may be that she is pleased with herself for not incurring punishment from him even though she believes she "broke the rules"—rules he imposed upon her. From her viewpoint, a positive consequence may be that she perceives others as viewing her husband as a real macho man.

The negative consequence may be that she is now in an apprehensive mood, and she may no longer enjoy the party. Another negative consequence may be that she feels wary so she begins to distance herself from him and she does not feel connected to him. If he engages in violent behavior, she will view arrest, charge, and criminal justice intervention as a negative consequence because she feels responsible for making him mad, and she believes she has broken the rules he told her to follow. Further, she believes and/or knows he will subject her to higher levels of abuse if he is arrested, charged, or prosecuted. She believes his involvement in the criminal justice system is due to her failure to act like a good wife.

- **Finally, the belief system.** Underlying this thought pattern is her belief system. "If I didn't break the rules, he wouldn't get upset. I must be a bad person because I keep breaking the rules." "I know he really loves me or he wouldn't act so jealous. That's just how men express their love." "I don't know what I would do without him. He's the only man who'd ever want me."

**TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIP**
Most victims describe the beginning of their relationship as being wonderful and intense. He pays a lot of attention to her; he wants to be with her all the time.

Then he begins to pout or express concerns about her interest in him if she does things independently of him. He may also explain how glad he is that she is not like his former spouse/partner, who was really difficult and even forced him to leave or doesn't let him see his kids. He explains his former spouse/partner did not understand him and turned everyone against him.

For many victims, they mistake these behaviors as devotion to a relationship--rather than recognizing these behaviors as red flags that indicate an abusive personality. These red flags include his insistence on obtaining information about her whereabouts at all times. Other red flags include the rapidness with which he establishes himself in her life, including making decisions for her, stating his inability to live without her, and insisting on a commitment to a relationship. His discussion about his former spouse/partner is a red flag as he does not take responsibility for the problems he experienced with that person.

As the relationship continues, she is drawn to the positive side of his actions: his attentiveness and his interest in her activities and the people in her life. As time passes, she becomes aware of feeling discomfort around some of his behavior, such as his reactions when she discusses doing things with others, but dismisses these feelings due to her desire to make the relationship work.

Domestic violence generally begins with forms of control through psychological and emotional abuse. He begins to suggest she ought not to do certain things or ought to do things a certain way if she loves him. She also begins to experience his anger if she does something he does not like. He begins to demand that she never do that again, or if she does not make the suggested changes, he asks her if she does not love him or thinks she is too good for him.

When confronted with the first incident of physical abuse, the victim will typically view the response as an aberration--a behavior that is not typical of this person and will not occur again. Further, she is likely to question what caused this behavior and wonder what she did to prompt this behavior, since he has never acted in this manner before.

If an unacceptable form of psychological or physical abuse occurs again, the victim will respond as most persons do: They will likely ask why the person is repeating such behavior. In an abusive relationship, the abuser will quickly shift the focus from his behavior to her behavior--stating that his actions are "provoked," "triggered," and/or "caused" by something she did or did not do. He makes it clear that she is responsible "for setting him off" and it won't happen again if she just changes her behavior.

Simultaneously, he is beginning the isolation process. As she becomes more isolated, she has fewer people with whom to reality check.
Additionally, she experiences a lot of emotional conflict. She is confused about what is happening to her, but she also feels responsible, resulting in feelings of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation. They become enmeshed in a pattern that stops only when she learns she is not responsible for his behavior and when he is held accountable for his behavior.

Adding to the complexity of this pattern is his increasing use of threats and force. This creates a new reaction--fear--which often keeps the woman trapped in the relationship. If she confronts him, he escalates his use of threats and force. If she states her intention to leave if he does not change his behavior, he engages in more severe forms of abuse, telling her that he will kill her if she tries to leave the relationship. She may find it takes less energy to stay and appease him than to try to leave. She may also come to realize it is safer to stay in the relationship than to leave.

OBSTACLES PREVENTING A VICTIM FROM LEAVING

The victim of abuse fears that when she tries to leave, she cannot make it on her own, for a variety of reasons such as lack of finances, lack of resources (i.e., housing), inability to care for the children without assistance, fear of what he will do when he finds the children and her, his pleas and promises that he will change if she just gives him one more chance, her desire to have a lasting marriage/relationship and father for her children, and her all-too-human desire to be with someone who loves her. Interspersed with his abusive behavior are his pronouncements of his love for her, his promise that he will change, and his statements that only she can help him change.

The question is not: "Why does a victim stay?" But rather, "What are the obstacles that prevent a victim from leaving?" A victim may face any/or all of these, or other obstacles:

1. Economic dependence on the abuser.
2. Fear for her safety and the safety of her children and/or other family members.
3. Isolation. She has no support system or others with whom to reality check.
4. Low self-esteem, especially after years of being told by the abuser how worthless she is and how she is to blame for all the violence that occurs.
5. Beliefs about family. She may believe that a family is not to air its dirty laundry and that all families encounter hard times. These beliefs are often reinforced by family, church members, and the legal system.
6. Beliefs about marriage. She may believe she must stay married forever, that it is "God's will."
7. Belief that she is the only person who can stop the abuser which is reinforced by the abuser who says that she is the only one who ever understood him.
8. Belief that he will find her no matter what she does to try to leave. This belief is based in reality if the abuser has hurt the victim when she attempted to leave.
9. Lack of options and resources. She does not have the money or the resources to support herself and her children.
10. Fear of being seriously hurt or killed if she attempts to leave. This fear is reinforced by the abuser who tells her that he will kill her if she ever tries to leave. Victims know these are not idle threats as they have feared for their lives before.
11. **Threats against others if the victim leaves.** The abuser frequently threatens to hurt all those whom the victim knows and loves—including children, family members, friends, and co-workers.

12. **Health concerns.** A victim of family violence may experience her own health issues in later life that make it difficult for her to leave, or she may feel that she must stay to take care of the abusive partner because of his health issues.

13. **Society's ageist responses to elder victims.** When elder victims of domestic violence report abuse, those to whom the abuse is reported often presume the abuse is the result of the victim's age, not the result of abuse. For example, people may blame the bruises on the victim's frail condition rather than on abuse. People may interpret the victim's silence around financial and other issues as senility and lack of ability rather than fear to speak up in the presence of the abusive person.

**LEAVING DOES NOT MEAN SAFETY**

Those who work with victims of domestic violence often put their emphasis on pushing the victim to leave the relationship. This approach may, in fact, put her at higher risk of danger. An appropriate response is to help her determine what her risks are and help her to problem-solve how to minimize those risks. In some cases, staying within the relationship may be the safest response.

- Statistics indicate that women are at a greater risk of becoming victims of domestic homicide when they attempt to leave the relationship. In fact, women who leave their batterers are at a 75 percent greater risk of being killed by their batterer than those who stay (Wilson and Daly 1993).

- Victims who attempt to leave are often hunted down--stalked, harassed, threatened, and pursued across county and state lines. This is so common it is known as "separation violence."

- The rate of attack against women separated from their husbands is about three times higher than that of divorced women and 25 times higher than that of married women.