



Understanding  
**Family & Domestic Violence**

## What is Family and Domestic Violence?

The term *Domestic violence* is often understood and explained as being physical and sexual assault or abuse. However, there are various forms, tactics and dynamics in which can be defined to be violence and abuse. For example; if we take *physical abuse*- a term that many of us can identify, we understand it to be physical injury to another. When we are considering physical abuse as a dynamic of family and domestic violence, this definition is widened according to legislation in various States. Physical abuse includes, physical injury to another; destruction of property; intimidation by means of looks; actions and gestures that instils fear; displaying weapons or material that can be used as a weapon and abusing family pets, which can also be an abuse on its own.

The various forms and tactics of violence and abuse as defined by family and domestic violence include:

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Social Abuse
- Spiritual Abuse
- Emotional/Psychological Abuse (links with Verbal Abuse)
- Verbal Abuse
- Violence towards pets

## Effects of Family and Domestic Violence

Women, who are exposed to domestic violence, can experience a range of symptoms as a result. Unfortunately, the length of time a woman stays with an abusive husband/partner is not a determinate for whether or not a woman will be exposed to these symptoms. In all cases of family and domestic violence, the most common symptom is low or lack of self esteem and confidence. Other symptoms include:

**Avoidances**- of being around couples; of answering phone calls to avoid speaking to abuser.

**Obsessive Behaviour**- to avoid thinking of the abuse/abuser.

**Hyper Alertness**- looking over your shoulder constantly when walking down the street; unable to watch scenes of violence or abuse on TV without experiencing heart palpitations, sweaty palms, etc.

**Nightmares**- constant dreams of the violence experienced or would have been exposed to if she had remained in the relationship.

**Sleeplessness**- unable to get more than 4-5 hours sleep and no restful sleep.

**Lower Temperament**- with friend and/or family, in particular with children.

**Sense of Loneliness**- loss of 'soul mate' resulting in not feeling to close to anyone, including family or friends.

**Inability to take pleasure**- in activities and places once enjoyed.

**Feeling of guilt**- that children witnessed the violence; that children are deprived of their father; that she was unable to change her husband/partner; for not leaving the relationship earlier.

These symptoms, if not dealt with early on, frequently develop into more serious health issues, for example a mental health issue of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These symptoms outlined above are examples of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. Recent studies have shown how exposure to violence can have the same affects on a person as a soldier who has experienced war (Kubany, McCaig and Laconsay, 2003).

If these symptoms are not addressed by a GP; Psychiatrist; Psychologist or counselling, then *depression* develops. However, many women who experience family and domestic violence do not link their *depression* as a result of the violence. As a result, many women don't disclose the abuse to their general practitioner.

Research surrounding PTSD as a result from family and domestic violence shows that time does not ordinarily 'heal' PTSD. The research completed by Kubany, McCaig & Laconsay (2003) shows that women who obtained counselling for their family and domestic violence were still suffering with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, symptoms as outlined above. This can be attributed to counselling not looking into the issues of family and domestic violence and correctly diagnosing the deeper issues, i.e. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

## How to Address the Issue of DV if you Identify it:

### Case Example

**Staff:** *I'm worried about you*

**Client:** *Huh? Why? What are you talking about?*

**Staff:** *Just as you were talking last night you said a couple of things that raised concern for me, for example; how you said your husband raised the back of his hand to you and that made you realise you had said too much and knew you were in trouble... that made me worried about you*

**Client:** *(Laughing) That? That was nothing, my husband was only kidding around. You completely misinterpreted it!*

**Staff:** *Well, good. I'm glad. And I wouldn't have pointed it out; it's just that this wasn't the only thing you said that made me worried. You also said that he calls you names and compares you to his ex-girlfriend which make you self conscious and uncomfortable. I know you said he laughs when he says this as though he is joking, but it is insulting and that can affect your self esteem. Things like that raise concern and make me worried about you. I can talk more about this with you, or arrange something with another woman who just works with women to give them time to talk and debrief about their life and relationships.*

## Important Notes

Many people don't leave violent relationships for a number of reasons. Some being; fear of rebuke from family and friends; fear of failure; against culture or religion.

However, more often, it is due to their abusive partner threatening that they would kill them if they did leave or that they will never see their children.

The most dangerous time for women in an abusive relationship is upon them leaving or disclosing the violence.

The second most dangerous time for women in abusive relationships is if she and her abusive partner seek couple counselling.

Statistics and research in the United States; Canada, United Kingdom and Australia inform us that it is these times that most Family and Domestic Violence Homicides take place.

Children are affected by violence even when they are not physically targeted. Witnessing and hearing the violence can also cause PTSD and depression.

## What to do next

The following steps should be taken, advise the client:

To keep a journal in a safe place of the abuse that occurs.

Keep all abusive text messages/ emails/ voicemail.

Advise to call the Local Area Command Police Family and Domestic Violence Liaison Officer to discuss the abuse and make a statement to either provide history of abuse or pursue an application for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order.

Inform them that they are not alone.

Refer to support services available in your area/region.

[The Salvation Army would like to acknowledge the contributions of Amy M David \(Co ordinating Manager at Northside Women's Service\), Noelle de Clifford and team.](#)



SUPPORTING  
**WHITE  
RIBBON** 

[justsalvos.com](http://justsalvos.com)