

There are many myths surrounding domestic abuse. Understanding the real facts helps to deconstruct these misconceptions. The following myth busters are sourced from Refuge:

Myth: Alcohol and drugs are to blame.

Fact: Many people are abusive when they are sober. Most people who drink alcohol are not domestic abusers. Blaming drink or drugs is an excuse, a way of denying responsibility.

Myth: It only happens to families from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Fact: People experiencing domestic abuse come from all walks of life, and can be any race, sexuality or religion.

Myth: People who are being abused would leave if it was that bad.

Fact: It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner. People experiencing domestic abuse may fear what a partner will do if they leave, particularly if the partner has threatened to kill her/him or the children. They may believe that staying is better for the children. Those who suffer abuse are often at the greatest risk of harm at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner. The person experiencing abuse may feel ashamed of what has happened and believe it is their fault. They may hope that the partner will change, remembering good times at the start of the relationship and hoping they will return. They may not have access to money, or anywhere to go. They may not know where to turn for help, particularly if English is not their first language.

Myth: Abusers grow up in violent homes.

Fact: Growing up in a violent home is a risk factor, and some children who experience abuse do go on to be abusive in their relationships. But many do not. Instead they may be repelled by violence because they have seen the damage it causes. Abusers may learn to be violent from the society within which they grow up but people who blame violence solely on their childhood experiences are avoiding taking responsibility for their actions. Violence is a choice an abuser makes; they alone are responsible.

Myth: Some people like violence.

Fact: Most people who are abused live in fear of their abuser. This is a way of blaming the survivor for what is happening.

Myth: Some people ask for it. They get what they deserve.

Fact: Violence and intimidation are not acceptable ways to solve conflict in a relationship. People using abusive behaviours will often attack their partner for no apparent reason. Again, this is a way of making excuses for the abuser's behaviour. It allows an abusive person to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

Myth: People using abusive behaviours have a mental illness.

Fact: The vast majority of people who abuse are not mentally ill. Research shows that the proportion of abusers with mental health problems is no higher than in society as a whole.

Myth: Stress is to blame for domestic abuse.

Fact: Some people who abuse their partners do suffer from stress. Again, this is a factor – not the underlying cause of the abuse. Many people who are stressed are never abusive.

Myth: They lose their temper sometimes, that's all.

Fact: It often is said that people who use abusive behaviours “lose their temper” or are “out of control”. The truth is that they are very much in control. Abusers are usually selective about when they hit their partner, for example in private or when the children are asleep. They choose not to mark their face or other parts of the body which show. They never “lose their temper” with other people. This suggests they are very aware of what they are doing and are “in control”. Many abuse their partners emotionally and psychologically, without ever using physical violence. This shows the extent of their control.

Myth: Domestic abuse is a private matter, you shouldn't get involved.

Fact: For far too long domestic abuse has been allowed to happen behind closed doors. People think what goes on in the home is private, and not their problem. Domestic abuse is a crime wherever it occurs. It is against the law. We are all affected by domestic abuse; we all have a responsibility to speak out against it. Only then can we tackle it effectively.

Myth: Men can't experience domestic abuse.

Fact: Although women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, it is certainly a very real issue for male survivors too, in heterosexual, gay and other kinds of relationships.

Myth: Perpetrators of domestic abuse cannot change.

Fact: Perpetrators can change. Treatment and support is available.