

The Impact of Men's Abuse on Women



Most men grow up with this crazy idea that everyone, partners and children included, shares the same views of the world as them. It is hard to risk stepping outside of our masculine culture to see what it is like from the vantage point of another culture - in this case, women's culture. Simply ask yourself: 'Would you put up with your behaviour if you were on the receiving end?' Unanimously, men respond, 'No way.' Yet men have a sense of entitlement, a belief that others can live with and accept the effects of their unacceptable behaviour. The people on the receiving end, the victim or victims, often have feelings of being trapped and will often try a range of strategies to cope with the abuse. Lee Bowker lists the ways women try to keep themselves safe:

1. *trying to talk their husbands out of further beatings;*
2. *extracting promises to end the abuse;*
3. *threatening some sort of non-violent action, such as contacting the police or filing for divorce;*
4. *hiding or escaping during the beatings;*
5. *using passive defences to protect themselves as much as possible from serious injury;*
6. *avoiding their husbands during periods of high potential for violence; and*
7. *fighting back.*

(Ending the Violence, pp. 19—33)

Two women's stories

Linda (26) had left Jeff because she had had enough. She went to her mother's to feel supported and safe. Jeff had rung fifteen times through the day, pleading to talk with Linda.

But Linda was refusing to talk to him, wanting time to think through what she would do. She was nervous, visibly jumping when the phone rang. Linda described herself as one scared woman. She was waiting for Jeff to eventually turn up at her mother's place. She described how she felt:

'It was like being on a knife edge. I wondered as I walked around the house, came out of the toilet, if he would be standing there. Mum said that she had talked to Jeff and she was sure that he really loved me. She gave me this big mother-daughter talk about how relationships had their ups and downs. She described what was happening as normal

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for relationships. Jeff had somehow convinced her that it was only a “lover’s quarrel.”

I decided at that moment to tell her the truth. I had hidden what was happening from everyone, feeling like I was the one who had failed. I was the one paying the price. I was the one who had lost two stone in weight, was on tranquillisers, was smoking like a train.

I told her how Jeff had beaten me regularly over the past year-and-a-half how he had accused me of having affairs, and how he would put me through the third degree every time I went out. Jeff was always pleasant in public, but get him alone and he was a monster.

Mum went quiet, having to weigh up these different pictures of the same man. At first she said that it mustn’t be as bad as I was making out. She didn’t want to believe my story of what was going on. I felt sorry for her as much as for me. Here we were, two women with our ideas of domestic tranquillity shattered. For the first time I think she began to understand.’

Joan (55), on the other hand, had lived with Harvey (58) for 35 years. Harvey was successful, at the top of his profession and involved in a range of service organisations. They shared a lifestyle that to the outside world seemed perfect.

‘He wouldn’t let me do anything. He expected me to be around the home, waiting for him to turn up and hear all about what he had done, who he had met, and what others thought of him. It was all me, me, me.

The children had now left and I was bored, so I thought about going back to university. You would think that I was asking for the world. His first comments were, “What about me?” I told him that it would not interfere with his life, that classes would be through the day. He then said, “Why do you want to go back to university? What’s the point? It’s a waste of time at your age anyway.” I felt so awful. Here I had spent 35 years of my life sacrificing my needs in order to look after a husband and children; all I was wanting was a bit of freedom.

Harvey would never hit me, I’m convinced of that. What he has done over the years is grind me down and expect me to always be there for him. I guess when we got married that that was the deal. I would be the dutiful wife and he would be the provider. It’s like a game to him. Every time I make a bid for freedom, he puts some obstacle in the way.

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Both these stories can tell us something about the impact of abusive ways of relating to others. 'When their sense of authority is threatened men will often exhibit self-righteous anger or use more subtle tactics as in Joan's story. Jeff, more than Harvey, is into self-righteous anger which is clearly more dangerous and scary for others. Harvey uses a more subtle form of control to keep his wife in check. Both men have a huge impact on the lives of their partners.



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