

## Defining family violence

### How do we define family violence?

Family violence is a complex issue that can affect all people regardless of culture, class socioeconomic status and gender. We will get into looking at several definitions of family violence shortly but first we would like you to try and define it.

#### Question...

- *What would your own definition of family violence be?*

### Three definitions of family violence

Look at the three definitions below and comment on how well, or not, you feel they define family violence.

#### Definition 1

*An act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person (Straus and Gelles, 1986:467).*

- *What do you think of this definition?*

#### Things to think about when considering this definition:

- "Physically hurting" is only one of the many facets of family violence. As well as the physical abuse victims may also be subject to sexual abuse, psychological abuse, intimidation and harassment as well as various other forms of abuse.
- The term "perceived intention" is interesting. Essentially this means that even if the abuser is not intending to physically hurt the other person but the other person thinks they will be physically hit it is still classed as abusive behaviour.

#### Definition 2

*A definition and estimated incidence of woman battering must take into account many complex elements that together weave a web of terror extending over a battered woman's everyday existence. Battering is not just overt physical and verbal behaviour of a man towards a woman. It is living with a constant sense of danger and expectation of violence. These together bring about terror that is slowly constructed and eventually fills the woman's environment (Edleson, Eiskovitz & Guttman, 1985:232).*

- *What do you think of this definition?*

### Things to think about when considering this definition:

- Again this definition doesn't allow for other types of abuse outside of 'physical abuse' although it touches on other forms of abuse through the section 'It is living with a constant sense of danger and expectation of violence'.
- Family violence can also be perpetrated by women. We know there are incidents of family violence where the male is the victim.
- The term "Battering" is an American term which refers to the act or practice of battering (physically harming) someone. The use of this term was first used in a New Zealand Court (Christchurch) in 1994 by Gaye Oakes who attempted but failed to use "Battered Woman's Syndrome" as a legal defence against a murder charge (prosecution claimed she had murdered her de facto partner)
- The section of the definition "many complex elements that together weave a web of terror extending over a battered woman's everyday existence" is particularly interesting and relevant. Many abused women often say it's the waiting and the constantly being on edge that is far worse than the beatings themselves.

### Definition 3

*Family violence includes intimidation, harassment, damage to property, sexual, or psychological abuse, and (in relation to a child) causing or allowing the child to witness the physical, sexual, or psychological abuse of a person with who the child has a familial relationship (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, May 1995).*

- *What do you think of this definition?*

### Things to think about when considering this definition:

- This definition is the official definition of family violence from the family violence act 1995. An important change to this act was the addition of psychological abuse being recognised as a form of violence. Before this, the old act did not include psychological abuse yet we know that this is a hugely destructive component of abuse. Also the addition of children witnessing abuse being considered abusive was a major step forward.

Get aware and get real about family violence and what you can do to help! Would you like to become more effective when working with family violence offenders and become an advocate for those who need help the most?

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