

## Deconstructing Domestic Violence

by

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“A woman is beaten every nine seconds in the United States. Domestic Violence is the most underreported crime in the country, with a suspected incidence 10 times higher than is reported.”

Abstract:

This article represents the unveiling of a series of articles addressing the issue of domestic violence. It is the beginning of this author's scripted actualization of the issue as informed by numerous professional individuals, entities, and victims of domestic violence. It is offered as a catalyst of transformation in our commitment to child wellness through healthy marriages and responsible parenting. The purpose of this article is to provide preliminary inroads into the exploration of issues of domestic violence for lay individuals committed to healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. Such individuals will concur with the perspective of this author, that domestic violence is antithetical to the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative and/or Movement. As individuals who are proponents of child wellness through healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, we recognize the importance of optimizing child welfare through our capacity as service providers in recognizing when our families may be suffering from this destructive predicament. We take hope in the experts' conclusions that domestic violence and/or abuse is a learned behavior, as we learn to identify into early detection for the purpose of early intervention as well as prevention.

Definition of Domestic Violence:

While defining domestic violence may vary from state to state, it is generally agreed that it is a particular category for what is a criminal act. Therefore there is no crime called domestic violence. Instead, it is a particular category for the crime of assault, perhaps stalking, and sometimes battery. Such crimes receive a categorization of domestic violence when the perpetrator and victim of such crimes are or have been sexually intimately involved.

Doub, et. al., define domestic violence as “a pattern of behaviors used to gain or maintain control of an intimate partner or family member. It is usually an escalating pattern of abuse where one partner controls the other through intimidation, force or the threat of violence.

Within the sphere of early intervention a continuum of categories of perpetrator behaviors which are identified. Benign occasions of potential for abuse include attempts to control decisions of one's partner are at one end of the spectrum. At the other end are overt acts of violence previously discussed. Benign indicators are early warning signs that, when addressed as they occur, minimize the probability that further movement in the direction of physical violence will occur. However, if the early are not addressed, they will usually develop into situations of domestic violence.

## Indicators of Domestic Violence:

Consider the following scenario. A couple begins dating. The male is attentive always interested in the whereabouts of the woman. The woman interprets this as an act of love and caring. Instead of establishing boundaries regarding her independence, she yields to his expectations that she account to him regarding her whereabouts. Soon they are steady, and he requires more of her time. Understand he may or may not be in her presence, yet he wants her in no one else's presence. This would include her family, friends, and anyone else who commands her attention. As the relationship progresses, he becomes more and more demanding of your time and other areas of compliance. At one point they may argue about it, and he may pound the dashboard really hard. Perhaps he slams a door or kicks a tire.

As the demands increase, the prospect of marriage is introduced in the picture. The prospects become a reality. The couple has not had marriage education, counseling, or therapy, because he feels it is not necessary. Now they are living together as husband and wife. She did not realize how often he drank. When she approaches him about it he gets really angry. She has no one to talk to because she hasn't confided in her friend and families for at least a year.

One thing leads to another, and then it happens. He slaps her in the face, or punches her really hard. He can't believe that he did such a thing. She is shocked. He apologizes profusely and takes her to dinner the next day. He has flowers and candy. Everything is better than it ever was before, that is until the next time when she is punched in the face. Flowers and dinner follow and the intensity increases as well as the frequency. One day there is a call for an ambulance, the police, or worse yet, an undertaker.

I wonder what would have happened if the woman had addressed the situation when "All I wanted to know was where you were, because I care so much about you." I assure you the scenario would have taken a different spin. There is another challenging point to this scenario and that is if one does not intervene early, the situation usually gets worse.

You have heard the term action speaks louder than words. This is the case for domestic violence. There are many situations where a potential victim of domestic and/or the survivor may not even realize what is going on because there have been no physical manifestations. Doub et. al., provide some early behavioral indicators that may inform us of when are relationships are headed down the destructive path of domestic violence.

Some behavior indicators of domestic violence are initially manifested subtly. Others are not. A domestic violence protocol questionnaire might include some of the questions following questions. The following represents both generalized questions, which might be asked of a potential perpetrator of domestic violence.

Do you have narcissistic tendencies? Do you expect to have your way all of the time and

become angry when this does not happen?

Are you the jealous type? Do you get aggravated when your spouse spends quality time with her or his friends, family, colleagues at work, etc.?

Are you preoccupied with guns, and others weapons of mass destruction, as a potential to invoke you will?

In your family life, are you able to negotiate your way or do you resort to imposing your will?

Are you addicted (abusing or dependent) on any alcohol or other drug substances?

Do you generally solve your problems with violence of any type?

Are you a traditionalist with extremely strong ideas regarding what people "should do"?

Are you sometimes too rough with family, friends and anyone else who will tolerate it?

Did you come from a home where "mom or dad" was abused?

Such questions are used to shape generally indicator assessments of potential to perpetrate domestic violence. They may be presented through a questionnaire or in an individual or group setting. Of course in educational, therapeutic, or counseling arenas, the best way to present such questions is through the usage of the words, who, what, when, where, how and why. This minimizes the potential for resistance to the reality. It also opens them up for discussion and significant self-exploration.

### Age Specific Indicators

A most frightening reality is the fact the correlation between children from 0-18 has an 80% chance of participating in domestic violence. Another tragic fact is that when parents are in suffering domestic violence in the home, children are often caught in the middle. To the despair of both parents, they may receive blows, physically, and emotionally never meant for them.

Because domestic violence is determined to be a learned behavior, the issue of normalcy surfaces. Many scholars have identified this point of reference as a measure of our capacity to tolerate as well as commit acts of domestic violence.

Steven Stosny helps inform the insight regarding our thresholds relative to anger and the manifestation of angry, often violent, responses. In other words if I grow up in a relationships is prone to be the same.

One important issue to be explored in this arena is the impact of such environments on the victim as well as the perpetrator.

Children, the innocent bystanders are always affected domestic violence in their family. The manifestation of the impact is manifested in a variety of ways, depending on an almost infinite influence of factors that are age, cultural, gender, and psychologically specific. The following is a summary of age specific impacts as identified in the Skills and Strengths for Families Affected by Domestic Violence instructor handbook. For children ages five and younger regression often occurs. They reflect behavior that used to do at an earlier stage of their development. Examples include thumb sucking,

bedwetting, and fear of darkness. They may cry often, look frightened, tremble, and perhaps shrink away from human contact.

From six to eleven children may recreate abusive behaviors they have witnessed at home. This behavior may manifest with siblings, school mates, and other peers. Behaviorally, they may be disruptive, suffering irrational fears, depression, anxiety, or emotional numbing captured in the clinical term, "Flatness."

Adolescents from 12 to 17 years may feel guilt because they are helpless in defending the primary victim of a domestic violence predicament. Usually this would be the mother. They may experience flashbacks to violent episodes at home, suffer from substance abuse, and suicidal ideation.

As adults the continuum continues because there was learning from parents and parental figures to use violence as the primary negotiating tool. I agree with Doub, et. al., that long term impacts of domestic violence in the home will never be captured.

Generally, there are often indicators revealed in terms of issues of abuse that may or may not be physical. Such occurrence that occurs between partners sexually intimate partners include and are not limited to financial, spiritual, psychological, verbal, sexual, emotional abuse and destructive acts.

Financial abuse incorporates controlling or manipulating you by threatening your economic status and basic needs. Spiritual abuse occurs when one's spiritual or religious beliefs are attacked. Psychological abuse means doing things that can cause one to question one's sanity, stalking, threatening to use weapons, or using children against the peace of mind of an individual are all examples of psychological abuse. Verbal abuse includes lying, denials, threats, put-downs, name-calling, interrogating, and the usage of individual's body parts, and/or additional behaviors that limit another individual's physical freedom. Then there is emotional abuse exemplified through isolation, and/or assaults against one's self esteem. Finally destructive acts are represented through real or implied assaults of an individual's property even pets for the purpose of invoking fear.

History of Domestic Violence:

While the practice of categorizing such crimes is a relatively new process, the history of domestic violence, its recognition as an issue with policy implications dates back to the temperance movement. Women, who were the leaders of this movement were motivated because of the high correlation between their husband's consumption of alcohol and their husband's perpetrating acts of physical abuse when inebriated.

While the history in the home was a common occurrence, it was a generally accepted response by the criminal justice system not to interfere in such affairs out of respect for the sanctity of the home. Domestic violence has continuously been a consciousness raising issue invoking such terms as "The rule of thumb," and other indicators of the severity of terror and destruction caused in the home by such usually establishing men as the perpetrators and women as the victims.

## Indicators of Domestic Violence:

Researchers in this area have identified emotional and behavioral impediments that have been correlated. While the following areas of emphasis are absolute predictors of the occurrence of domestic violence, they have been identified relative to a generic profile of a perpetrator of it. The correlates of domestic violence are: (1) inadequate or inappropriate Anger Management Skills, (2) poor Conflict Resolution Skills, and (3) the manifestation of Power through Dominance and Control.

While each of these correlates have been independently and significantly and positively correlated with the perpetration of domestic violence, there are not independent of one another. Therefore, it is difficult to define any one of the three as predictive. However, their interdependence and high level of correlation with the incidence of domestic violence, merit exploration of each with full expectation that such insights will empower our capacity to assist our clients in transforming behavior conducive to the perpetration of domestic violence. A brief description of each of the components follows.

## Responding to Domestic Violence

Reported cases of domestic violence are managed through the local District Attorney's office. The process of such management does not deviate significantly from city to city or from state to state. A template of such processing would include:

The reporting of a suspected incident indicated through disturbances such as screams, cries, bangs, bumping, and other indicators of assault.

The police responding to the scene in question, gaining access to the premises and establishing or not establishing probable cause.

If such is established, then the predominant perpetrator, not the instigator but the winner of the fight is arrested.

Most laws protect individual rights requiring an individual stay in this arrested state for no longer than 24 hours without a court appearance. Since most domestic violence occurs at night, the next morning is usually the time when the case is heard.

The accused perpetrator pleads either guilty or not guilty to the charges.

If the accused pleads guilty then, depending on whether or not this is a first offense, diversion, or other penalties will be imposed by the judge. However, if the accused pleads not guilty, then the case bound over for trial at a later date.

The results of the trial will determine the plight of the accused. If the accused is found guilty of this particular type of assault, the ramifications may include, (1) jail, (2) fines, (3) domestic violence/anger management classes. Seldom is the couple provided couple counseling because of the dangers of enhanced violence within such a construct.

Recall that domestic violence is not a crime. It is a particular category of crimes that include assault, stalking, and battery, which occurs between two individuals who have been sexually active. In another work we discuss legal issues, affecting African Americans and perhaps others relative to the potential for mismanagement of each of the above phases of processing domestic violence.

Within the context of court ordered responses to these issues, an industry of service

providers facilitate interventions used to contain the perpetrator and protect the victim. When one considers the level of crisis regarding harm to self and/or others when such incidents occur, there are no other options reasonable to optimize the safety of all involved.

It is our perspective that while the above predicaments as a result of this particular criminal category, domestic violence, is necessary, it is also a growing perspective that the capacity for early intervention, often termed prevention would reduce the occurrences of such severe and disruptive family predicaments.

#### Groups Prone to Commit Domestic Violence:

While 85% of perpetrators of domestic violence are men. The issues of domestic violence cuts across race and class. Observing attendees of domestic violence classes, demonstrates this reality. There is emerge three distinct populations who are most prone to suffer from these issues. These communities are not only high risk but lack the supports traditionally available because of the nature of their respective communities. Such communities include: military families, families of law enforcement, and families, tightly controlled cultural or religious communities. For example refugees from third world countries which where women suffer oppression represent good candidates for this explanation. Many domestic violence treatment providers address needs explicit to this population. The significant application of the Power of Two, developed by Susan Heitler, represents this reality.

#### Conclusions

Through this contribution, we have not even begun to scratch the surface toward recognizing the significant impact domestic violence and/or abuse has on healthy marriage. We can affirm the fact that it is learned behavior. We recognize it as being antithetical to the healthy marriage movement. We know that it affect the most valuable commodity we access our children.

The reality of our benign awareness of this issue makes the work of early intervention or prevention all the more crucial. There are warning signs. They are indicators and patterns. It is incumbent upon us to recognized the serious impacts this family cancer can imposes on the very concept of healthy marriages not to mention happy families.

While we may not all become approved domestic violence providers, we owe it to ourselves and the people we serve to learn as much as we can about this topic in order to effectively facilitate or case manage change.

This article invokes ideas for other topics of research to be pursued. Future topics of inquiry might address the following questions:

The Dance of Domestic Violence

Exploring the impact of Domestic on Children

From Victim Protection to Victim Empowerment

Nipping It In The Bud  
Legal Issues and Cultural Implications  
Anger, Dominance, and Conflict  
Domestic Violence: An Historical Analysis  
Assessment Tools for Domestic Violence and Abuse

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