



Empowering survivors of

Gender-Based Violence

GBV MYTHS, FACTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

Gender-Based Violence (GBV), domestic violence, and sexual violence are often misunderstood. Myths, stereotypes, and misinformation can make it harder for survivors to recognise abuse, seek support, or feel believed.

This guide addresses some of the most common misconceptions and frequently asked questions about abuse, consent, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

Understanding the facts helps create safer communities, support survivors, and challenge harmful attitudes that allow abuse to continue.

MYTHS & FACTS

Myth: Abuse is only physical violence.

Fact: Abuse can take many forms, including emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, digital, and verbal abuse, as well as coercive control. A person does not need visible injuries for abuse to be serious or harmful.

Myth: If it was really abuse, they would just leave.

Fact: Leaving an abusive relationship is often complicated and can be the most dangerous time for a survivor. Fear, financial dependence, children, isolation, cultural pressures, trauma bonding, and concerns about safety can make leaving extremely difficult.

Myth: People who stay in abusive relationships must enjoy the abuse.

Fact: No one chooses to be abused. Survivors often stay because they are trying to protect themselves, their children, their financial security, or because they hope the abuse will stop. Remaining in an abusive relationship is not a sign of weakness.

Myth: Domestic violence only happens in certain communities.

Fact: Domestic violence affects people of all ages, genders, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds, and income levels. Abuse can happen in any community.

Myth: Abuse is caused by anger or stress.

Fact: Stress, anger, alcohol, and relationship problems do not cause abuse. Abuse is a choice to use power, control, intimidation, coercion, or violence against another person.

Myth: If there are no bruises, it is not abuse.

Fact: Many forms of abuse leave no visible injuries. Emotional abuse, coercive control, financial abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, and psychological abuse can have profound and long-lasting effects.

Myth: Sexual violence is usually committed by strangers.

Fact: Most survivors know the person who harmed them. Perpetrators may be partners, spouses, family members, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, or others known to the survivor.

Myth: Rape can only happen between strangers.

Fact: Rape can occur in any relationship, including marriages, dating relationships, and long-term partnerships. Consent is required regardless of relationship status.

Myth: A person must physically fight back for it to be rape.

Fact: Many people freeze during a traumatic event. Fear, shock, intimidation, or trauma can make it difficult or impossible to resist. Freezing is a common and natural trauma response.

Myth: What someone wears, drinks, or does can cause rape.

Fact: No behaviour, clothing, relationship history, or alcohol consumption causes rape. Responsibility always lies with the perpetrator.

Myth: If someone didn't say "no," it means they consented.

Fact: Consent requires a clear, voluntary, and informed agreement. Silence, fear, uncertainty, or inability to respond should never be assumed to mean consent.

Myth: People in relationships don't need consent.

Fact: Consent is required every time, regardless of whether people are dating, married, engaged, or in a long-term relationship.

Myth: Men cannot experience domestic violence or sexual violence.

Fact: People of all genders can experience abuse and violence. Everyone deserves access to support, protection, and resources.

Myth: Alcohol causes sexual violence.

Fact: Alcohol does not cause sexual violence. Sexual violence occurs because someone chooses to violate another person's boundaries and consent.

Myth: Children are not affected if they do not directly witness the abuse.

Fact: Children can be significantly affected by living in homes where abuse occurs, even if they do not see every incident. Exposure to violence can affect their emotional wellbeing, development, behaviour, and sense of safety.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?

Gender-Based Violence refers to harmful behaviours directed at a person because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender roles. It includes many forms of abuse, including domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, coercive control, and stalking.

What is the difference between GBV and domestic violence?

GBV is a broad term that includes many forms of violence and abuse linked to gender inequality and power imbalances.

Domestic violence is one form of GBV and occurs within intimate, family, or domestic relationships.

What is the difference between sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape?

Sexual violence is the broad term used to describe any sexual activity or behaviour that occurs without consent.

Sexual assault refers to unwanted sexual contact or sexual behaviour without consent.

Rape is a form of sexual assault involving penetration without consent.

What is consent?

Consent is a freely given, informed, voluntary, and ongoing agreement to engage in a specific activity.

Consent cannot be obtained through force, intimidation, threats, manipulation, coercion, or when a person is unable to make an informed decision.

Can consent be withdrawn?

Yes.

A person can withdraw consent at any time, even if sexual activity has already begun. Once consent is withdrawn, all sexual activity must stop immediately.

Can someone be sexually assaulted by their spouse or partner?

Yes.

Marriage, dating, or being in a long-term relationship does not mean automatic consent. A spouse or partner can commit sexual assault or rape.

Why don't survivors leave sooner?

There is no single answer.

Survivors may remain because of fear, financial dependence, concern for children, lack of support, housing insecurity, emotional attachment, trauma bonding, cultural expectations, or threats made by the abusive person.

Why do survivors sometimes return to abusive relationships?

Returning to an abusive relationship is common and does not mean a person wants to be abused.

Many survivors return because of hope, fear, concern for children, financial pressures, isolation, trauma bonds, promises of change, or lack of safe alternatives.

Can an abusive partner change?

Meaningful change is possible for some people, but genuine change requires accountability, sustained effort, professional intervention where appropriate, and a willingness to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

Promises, apologies, gifts, or temporary improvements alone do not necessarily indicate lasting change.

What are trauma responses?

Trauma responses are normal reactions to overwhelming or frightening experiences.

Common responses include:

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Fawn (people-pleasing to increase safety)

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to respond during or after abuse.

How can abuse affect survivors?

Abuse can affect a person's:

- Physical health
- Emotional wellbeing
- Mental health
- Relationships
- Employment or education
- Finances
- Sense of safety and self-worth

The effects may be immediate or may emerge months or years later.

Is healing possible after abuse?

Yes.

Recovery looks different for every survivor, but healing is possible. With support, information, safety, and appropriate resources, survivors can rebuild confidence, wellbeing, healthy relationships, and hope for the future.

Key Message

Abuse is never the survivor's fault. Everyone has the right to live free from violence, fear, coercion, and control. Understanding the facts is an important step towards building safer relationships, supporting survivors, and creating communities where dignity, respect, and equality are valued.